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Mrs Conover

With love & sincere sympathy
from S. Raleigh

THOUGHTS FOR THE WEARY
AND THE SORROWFUL

THOUGHTS



for the *Feeble*

AND

The *Sorrowful*

BY

ALEXANDER RALEIGH

“The ‘Man of Sorrows’ . . .
Is more to us than all His miracles.”

SECOND EDITION

EDINBURGH: A. & C. BLACK

1882

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following papers consist of selections from my husband's manuscripts, and except two short extracts, have not been hitherto published in any of his works. In giving to them the form of a book designed for consolation, I have attempted only what he intended and even promised to do with his own hand, had time and opportunity served.

Fragmentary as the little volume is, it may perhaps be welcome to some who are in sorrow or loneliness, who are weary with toil and care, or who,

for any reason, have passed out of the sunshine and are walking among the shadows of life. Its thoughts are simple, without elaborate reasoning or much critical research. Comfort indeed does not often come by argument or by abstract thinking ; rather it makes way by symbol, by subtle touches of sympathy, and by words which reveal the Father's heart to His desolate children. If any of them are made to feel a little less desolate by reading these pages, or led more fully into the love of God and the "patient waiting for Christ," the book will have fulfilled its mission.

MARY RALEIGH.

LONDON, *December 1882.*



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“ BUT if, impatient, thou let slip thy cross,
Thou wilt not find it in this world again,
Nor in another ; here, and here alone,
Is given thee to suffer for God’s sake.
In other worlds we shall more perfectly
Serve Him and love Him, praise Him, work for Him
Grow near and nearer Him with all delight ;
But there we shall not any more be called
To suffer—which is our appointment here. . . .

If He should call thee from thy cross to-day,
Saying, ‘ It is finished—that hard cross of thine,
From which thou prayest for deliverance ! ’—
Thinkest thou not some passion of regret
Would overcome thee ? Thou would’st say, ‘ So soon ?
Let me go back and suffer yet awhile
More patiently ; I have not yet praised God.’
And He might answer to thee,—‘ Never more ;
All pain is done with.’ Whensoe’er it comes,
That summons that we look for, it will seem
Soon, yea too soon. Let us take heed in time,
That God may now be glorified in us.” . . .

“ THE DISCIPLES.”



God, the God of the Living.¹

God is the God of individual men in this world. He was “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Our Lord reminds us that He was so revealed to Moses at the bush, and known by that name to the people of Israel. Nor has the history of the world since revealed any greater names than those of the old fathers of the Jewish race. Abraham still shines before us as though transfigured on the mountain heights of Palestine. He is the man who has left home and country and kindred. He is the man

¹ Luke xx. 38.

who, in a sense, has left the very world he is living in, for he owns not a foot of soil except a grave! He has not a house anywhere—can hardly be said to have a well. A grand pilgrim-man—sacrificing, worshipping, travelling, looking up to the hills by day and the stars by night—and looking for a city above them all!

And Isaac—not intellectually great, but gentle and peaceful as the fields he walked in at eventide, and as the flocks that pastured in them, inheritor of his father's name and policy, and spirit and faith.

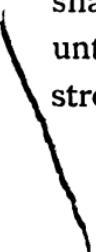
And Jacob. If you choose to say “Jacob—crafty, unscrupulous, self-seeking!” Well, that is true. That is Jacob according to the flesh. But there is another Jacob—disciplined, chastened, humbled, God's new man, His strong wrestler, His man of prayer,

whom He names anew in the moment of victory “ Israel ;”—and with him you may be proud to claim kinship.

So fully and personally did God reveal Himself to these men, that their successors—their children and their children’s children through long generations—took something of their father’s experience, and lived something of their life. Nay, we also are beholden, and all Christian people—how much it would be hard to tell—to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Truly does Paul call the first patriarch “ our father Abraham.” He is our father especially in this, that he teaches us how to believe, and in no general or abstract sense, but personally and individually to take God for our own God.

What the pious Jews meant when they said “ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” we mean when we

say "The God of our fathers." This title is one of the most practically powerful by which God is known to us. It is the homeliest, tenderest, and the most human. It sways and melts and gently agitates the heart. It is not a title so grand, so dominant, so all-comprehending as "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;" but it is a title which suits some humbler moods better, and touches more powerfully our homelier feelings, and perhaps allays more quickly some of our human fears. "He was their God: He will be ours. He stood by them in their conflicts and brought them off victorious: He will stand by us in ours. He perfected His strength in their weakness: our weakness shall have the same reinforcement, until it becomes divine and irresistible strength."



“The God of our fathers.” Some of them, although sainted, are but a little way in advance. We can almost hear the rustle of their garments as they were passing away, and in many a place in life we see the footmarks they have left; and memories of *their* pilgrimage arise in our hearts and float about us helpfully as we continue our own. “Our fathers!” Dear names—if we make them and keep them dear by entering ourselves into covenant with God, and by remembering His goodness and grace to them, to help us faithfully to keep it.

But Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob died. They all died.

“The days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived were an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man and full of

years ; and was gathered to his people. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah."

"And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days : and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."

Dead ! All dead and buried long ago ! Long long ago when our Lord spoke, and many generations before the time even when Moses stood at the bush. When he stood there in the desert, Abraham had been dead more than three hundred years—nearer four hundred ; and Jacob one hundred

and fifty years. They had gone to dust in the cave of Machpelah.

Then how does this affect God's relation to them? Does it end it—or alter it—or modify it? He called Himself their God while they lived, what is He to them now that they are dead? The answer is: still their God—still the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. When the men are gone for ever from mortal sight, He keeps the title He bore to them, and still wears their names in close association with His own. God called to Moses out of the burning bush, and said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and from that time until now He has worn, and has never wearied of the title. He has been to His people the God of their fathers in every land and age, as He was the God of the real

historic men known to us as the heads of all the faithful. And His people have strengthened their faith, and stayed their steps, and oftentimes revived their sinking courage, by the memory of the title in their thoughts, and by the use of it in their prayers.

We ask now—what does this imply regarding these men? In the answer to this question we come upon our Saviour's teaching, and it implies that these dead men, whose names God wears interwoven with his own, are not dead to Him, but fully and eternally alive. In no other case, and on no other supposition, would the living God consent and continue to be their God. Whether Moses fully knew this to be implied in the title when he heard it at the bush, and whether God meant then expressly to teach the people the doctrine of personal im-

mortality by means of it—these are secondary questions, which men may innocently settle either way, according to their convictions. The thing of real significance is the meaning put into the words, or rather found in them, by our Lord. Let them mean what they might to Moses, they mean this to Christ, and to all who learn of Him. They are His own words ; He spoke them Himself long ago, and now He explains their meaning ; and they say to us that God would not be called the God of dead men. That would be to call Himself the God of names, the God of shadows that have melted away, the God of tales that have long been told out, the God of that which once was, or seemed to be, but which is, and can be, no more, the God of dust and ashes. Some dust would no doubt be in the cave of Machpelah in

the days of Moses, and in the days of Christ, and even in our own ; and the Sadducees of that day and the Materialists of this would say, “ That dust is the sole residuum of the saintly shades once embodied among men, and known as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They have come to this, and your God is the God of this ! Intelligence, and affection, and generosity, and tenderness, and courage, and faith, and wonder, and worship, have all come to this ! Or if these were in any wise preserved, they went into the lives of other men, of other shades like themselves, and thence again to shades beyond, and so on indefinitely,—every shadow called a man coming at last to a small handful of dust.”

God resents the interpretation, and says He would disown the well-worn title if it meant no more than that.

Not that He despises dust in itself. The world is made of it; rocks are builded dust; trees are growing dust; living creatures are animated dust; the very stars are glowing burning dust. The question is one of order and divine propriety. God cannot call Himself "the God" of unresponsive things. The cattle on a thousand hills are His, but He does not call Himself *their* God. Nay more, He does not call Himself, in any full sense, *the God* of ungodly men. If men are ungodly, secular, sensual, selfish, materialistic, He would be ashamed to be called their God, in the high, full sense. They have Bacchus, they have Mammon, they have the god of this world,—let them, if they will have it so, sacrifice at their own altars, and worship at their own shrine.

But let men—like the great men of the olden time—be strangers here, and pilgrims to a better country, and then He is their God and He will proclaim the fact on the earth and in the heavens. “Living, they live unto the Lord; dying, they die unto the Lord; living or dying they are the Lord’s.” Dying? They never die to God. To us they die, but not to Him. They pass out of our sight, but not out of His. They leave one world, but they go into another in which they are nearer to God than they were here. We sorrowfully part from them: He joyfully meets them. We sigh our weeping farewells: His angels sing welcomes. We say at our new-made graves, “All is over! here is an end.” He corrects the estimate of our blindness—tells us that there is *no end* to the life of a child of His—

that what we see is the putting off of a garment that begins to impede the movements, the laying down of a burden which is growing too heavy to bear—and that the liberated spirit, in the unbroken continuity of the life eternal, is in the heavenly worlds. The dying are the living : “they all live unto God.” Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are set for ever in His kingdom above ; and priestly and patriarchal and prophetic and kingly men, and humble souls unknown to fame, from every part of the world, are being added to the great society, and are themselves becoming new centres of attraction to friends from whom they have been parted.

Undoubtedly the great sorrow of the world is the sorrow of death. The shadow of it coming on : the chill which spreads through a house when

it enters : the bitter pang of parting, and the aching of the bereaved heart : the vain longing for renewal of the broken fellowship : the listening for the word that is never spoken, for the footfall that is never heard : the looking through tear-dimmed eyes for the face that has vanished for ever from earth : the sense of insecurity that is left in the family consciousness, or in some individual heart : the quick alarm when new sickness comes : the thought that the process can never end until all have gone—these are some of the sad miseries of death. And there is no natural relief from them ; no natural consolation will much assuage them ; nothing less than this assurance, that those who are taken from us are taken, not into death, but into life.

The sweet infant in the mother's

arms ; the child in the bud-state—beginning to love, to wonder, to question ; the maiden flowering into fair womanhood ; the young man fresh in promise as the morning of a bright May-day ; those in the prime of life and usefulness, who, as we say, cannot be spared ; and those who, although in old age, are still young in spirit—all are taken. O thou great mystery of death ! How cold, how cruel thou art in thyself, when we look on thee alone ! All the drapery of the world cannot hide thee ; all the beauty of the world cannot adorn thee ; all the fires of the world cannot take away the chill from thy touch. And there is but one consolation for all this great and never-ending sorrow in connection with the dying of human creatures ; and that is—that the good at least among them live—*they all live unto God.*



To the Weary.

THE WEARY! Many a one listens at the word, and answers to it as a description of himself. No experience is more common among men than that of weariness. The causes of it are very manifold, and the degrees of it range from utter exhaustion of mind, bordering on despair, to its slightest form, when it seems no more than a passing shadow.

Now it ought surely to give some strength and consolation to every weary soul to know that this state is recognised and provided for. He who never wearies, whose light is

never dim, whose emotion is in unsubsiding fulness, *thinks* of the weary among men, pities them, and provides for their help. The knowledge of this ought to be strength to weak and weary hearts.

The overtoil of life is one frequent cause of weariness. And there is much of that in our day! Every kind of industry and enterprise is pushed on as far as may be by every kind of activity and device. Human strength is calculated and used just as the power of a steam-engine is tested and utilised. More than that. For a steam-engine cannot be driven beyond its power; not one atom of force can be got out of it that is not in it. You cannot deal unfairly by it. You cannot draw out of the ultimate fountains of force in nature; they are kept in such entire secrecy, and are so closely

and constantly under the hand of God, that no man, and no combination of men, can avail themselves of them.

It is otherwise with the human being. The force here is not merely mechanical—it is vital; it is not pressure—it is life, life under the control of the will. There the fountain of energy is open to a man. He *can* draw too much out of it, and the life that would flow on for threescore years and ten, and even beyond that, is spent and gone at fifty! Under the pressure of our modern civilisation men do draw from the organic springs during one day more than is there for the day. To use a homely image—they sink the bucket deep down into the well of life and draw it up fast, and sink it again and yet again, till the well is dry. Or to use another familiar figure—they draw out of the

account current in the bank of their strength, day by day, more than Nature puts into it. They touch the deposit account—the far down strength that ought never to be touched till the dying day—and then, of course, they are “weary.”

Now one word “in season” to some of these is a word of remonstrance. *You should not do this!* You should not willingly extend and enlarge your affairs so as to necessitate this excessive draft on your reserve of strength. You plead the necessities of the case—the needs of the children—the uncertainties of the future! I plead the law of God. You are shortening your days; you are overclouding them with mist and rain; and you are bringing on a weariness for which you cannot have so much consolation as if it came on you lawfully.

Still it is true that in many cases it is hard to say where the line is beyond which a man ought not to go; and amid the diversities and complications of life, it comes to pass that many are weary without consciously going beyond what duty demands, and many by an inexorable necessity, out of which no way is open to them. Work hard you must! Then think how divine is work, more divine than anything else except love! God works in every place, through every moment, in every visible thing. In all the life that lives, and in all the death that dies, God is working.

Not only so; but work is as proper to a human life as to the divine life. The being, made in the image of God, is gifted with abilities for the manifestation of his own nature, similar in some ways to the activities of God.

When man was made complete and perfect, he was not therefore left to the nurture of idleness. Not for one day ! He was put into the garden “to dress it and to keep it.” The curse fell on the ground for man’s sake; but no curse ever fell on the labour which overcomes it. That is the vanquisher of the curse. By that, blessed and sanctified, the curse *shall* be vanquished.

A man, then, working in his lawful work—putting his whole nature into motion—may think, “I am, in my little human measure, like God in this ; like the God who has been working hitherto, and who will work for evermore. I am not like Him in my weariness, but I *am* like Him in my work, and it makes my weariness less, to think that in my daily toil I have divine fellowship.”

Think, too, how this over-toil, which

you cannot resist or control, tends to enhance the consolations and blessings of the gospel. The hours of rest, the times of refreshing, the Sabbath days, the converse of friends, the short holiday,—these things have a somewhat higher relish imparted to them by the severity of the task-work in which so many are held.

Think too, how all this earthly labour, if it be well wrought, is preparing, sweetening, refining the heavenly rest. It may seem almost idle to make comparison between the entrance of one mortal man and that of another into heaven ; the rest there will be so welcome to all ! But surely it must be *more* delightful at first to those who enter it from lifelong toil and heat and strife, than to those who had more restfulness about them in their allotment on the earth. Do not

weary, then, in the making of your own heaven! You, skilled workman! You are shaping it in the things you make. You, book-keeper! You are securing it in the figures of your calculation. You, trader! You are buying it in what you buy, and confirming the purchase in what you sell. You, merchant, seeking goodly pearls until you are weary in the search! Whatever you may miss or find in your earthly ventures, you will certainly, if you live by divine law, find at length a pearl of far greater price than any to be found here. You, mistress of the house, weary and worn down with children, servants, home-cares! You are treading in this toilsome, although secluded path, upwards to the heavenly fields. You, servant, doing your duty well, perhaps amidst many difficulties! You are serving a Master who will say to you one day,

“ Well done—be ruler now.” All work, however hard or exhausting it may be, has the grand function of preparing the worker, if he works in faith, for the heavenly rest.

Some are very weary of the *commonness* of life. They have strength enough to do all, but all they do seems little worth doing. And in proportion as they think highly of their nature, they think unfavourably of their circumstances and their tasks. It seems strange that a divinely-gifted creature—carrying the light of immortality in his breast, and a mirror that reflects the image of God, and a heart that holds His love, and thoughts that keep company with *His* thoughts—should be set to such mean employment, and kept at it so long. Figuring through endless calculations; talking superficial talk, about the weather, or the

state of the markets, or the quality of some piece of goods ; asking the same questions, saying the same things, smiling the same smile, many times every day ; trudging through the same streets, meeting the same people,—in short, going the same trivial round day by day, with the same small inappreciable results. Oh, it is wearisome !

Life is often wearisome, too, in the still more private walks of life—in homes. How many must there be in the great forest of houses which go to make up a city, to whom life is a daily burden, not because of the greatness, but because of the littleness of their work—because they have so little on which they can write clearly the great name of “Duty.” It seems to be all drudgery, triviality—nothing.

To such the word in season, surely is, that life is noble and not com-

mon. We cannot controvert the outer facts. Many things in the lives of Christian men are little in themselves,—they could not well be less. But they lose their littleness when they are associated with the higher things in which true life consists. If I am faithfully serving Christ, does it really very much matter whether my hand holds a sceptre, a pen, or a spade—whether I handle thousands every day, or only shillings and pence—whether I meet many people or few—whether my house is large or small—whether my name is famous or utterly unknown? Not *where* I am; but *what* I am, and what I am becoming, is the thing! Not what I do; but how I am doing it! Not whether I am high or low in earthly place and estimate; but whether I am high or low in temper, tone, purpose!

Now, supposing that you are in the place where God's providence has put you, and that you are really called to the kind of duties that await you every day—then don't call them "common :" God has cleansed them for you, and they are as good as any other, for the accomplishment of life's moral ends. If anything of nobler outward aspect can be added to your life—well. If you can have the seeming commonness relieved by something greater and better—some new task, endeavour, or friendship—well. But if not, then call not the life which God in His infinite wisdom has appointed for you, which by His great redeeming act He has purified, which, from the roll of His providence, is unfolding itself under His very eye, which is quickened by the stirrings of His spirit, and has the seeds of

immortal glory in its bosom,—call it not common! It is good, unless you make it evil. It is great, unless you make it little. When God calls His kings from earth to heaven, He still finds many of them where Elijah found Elisha—at the plough; where Samuel found David—with the sheep; where the Saviour found Peter and James and John—with the fishing nets.

Great spirit-weariness often comes from *the difficulties and perplexities* of life; by the multiplicity of things, by the varieties of them, by their crossings and intercrossings, by the sudden changes that come, altering circumstances so that duty is made different. Life with most is not simple, it is very complex; and how to get through—how to be just to every interest that arises—how to

consider each claim that comes, and each person whose claim it is—how to make allowance for peculiarity of disposition, for differences of judgment, and for ever-changing circumstances—how hard it is! And what a weariness it is apt to become!

Even in a family of ordinary size, in no peculiar circumstances, and with no unusual troubles, there are the materials of constant perplexity, and of much heart-weariness. Suppose that any member of that family—father, mother, sister, or brother—wishes to do his or her duty fully and faithfully by all the rest, will it be easy? We do not, I think, realise at all what a trouble we are to each other! What shadows we cast (not designing it) on each other's way! How hard we make some paths that lie close by our own! Children!

Young men and women ! Do you know what an anxious care you are to father or mother ? How you load them with unseen burdens, and perplex them with difficulties they are not likely to express or explain to you ? Do you know what an anxiety it is sometimes to them to know whether to speak or to keep silence, whether to give advice or to hold their peace even from good, whether to act with authority, or to wait—in patience and prayer ? And do you know how, when they are doing all for the best, and have no complaint to make of you, they are yet, against their own will, wearied and worn out with the ceaseless ministrations of love ?

Then to go beyond the family—there are the perplexities of business, the writing of difficult letters, the

making of important engagements and promises, the duties consequent on success or failure; there is the watching of the action of others—and, in a word, all the flux and reflux of this ever-moving world. Surely it is not surprising that here and there at least there should be a weary spirit,—one tired of ceaseless bargain-making, one almost disgusted with the daily work of guarding against the guile and over-reaching of others, and ready to say with Job, “I loathe it; I would not live alway.”

What shall the “word in season” be for such? This at any rate. Seek the Master’s feet. Be sure you cast “all your care on Him, for He careth for you.” Be sure you take the help He is so near to give, and the love He is always breathing about you. To make an unreserved communica-

tion of your difficulties to Him will much endear and strengthen the bond of attachment. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass." "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not."

Then there are those who are weary with the *great* strife of every good man's life—the strife with sin. Every vital process in the world is subject to pause and blight and hindrance. Buds are nipped with frost; green leaves are shrivelled with the east wind; young creatures pine and sicken, and for a while cease to grow. And the *highest* vital process is subject to the same vicissitudes. The *divine* life in a man has times of pause and uncertainty, even of apparent retrogression, when all that is past

seems quite in vain, and the so-called progress has circled round, almost to the very beginning, once more. How wearyful to the spirit to have the good and evil still at war, after all our victories! To have old unbeliefs come back upon us! Old fears revive! Old swervings repeat themselves! Does it not sometimes seem as if there were no necessary "perseverance of saints," or as if *we* are not saints persevering? Why are the serene heights where victor-spirits walk clad in white, yet so far above us? Why is the progress so uncertain? When shall the strife end at last? And *how*? In victory or defeat?

"Be of good courage." "Have faith in God."

Did you ever hear of a river of any length that runs straight from its source into the sea? There is not

one in all the world. I know some which bend and turn and almost circle round again and again. I know some which flow back for miles as if they were fleeing from the sea which they are seeking all the while.

Did you ever see a tree grow straight up to heaven—never bending a branch to the wind, never losing a leaf in the summer gale?

Is there a bird that can soar right upward to the zenith? Even the lark or the eagle have some curves in their flight, as they go up to the sky.

Is there recorded life of saint, in God's book or in any other, whose way was one long ascent without stay or shadow or weariness? What is his name? Is it Jacob, who said "All these things are against me"? Is it Moses, who prayed "If not, blot me out of Thy book"? Is it David, who

cried so often out of the depths? Is it Elijah, who asked for death in the wilderness? Or Jonah, who repeated the prayer? Or Peter, who sank in the waves he tried to tread, and wept in the dark night as he thought of the Master he had forsaken? Or even the intrepid Paul, who writes so mournfully "All men forsook me" and so intensely "O! wretched man that I am?"

To be weary with *such* weariness, is, as you see, to be in good company. Persevere! "Cast not away your confidence." Wait on the Lord, and He will renew your strength—till, in His great heaven of holiness, you mount up as on eagles' wings.



Christ our Forerunner.

CHRIST JESUS was received up into heaven that He might carry on His work the more effectively. In one sense that work was finished when He died, but in the larger sense it was only then beginning; and it is going on now. He is at the right hand of God. He is in honour and in power and in full intense work, for God's glory and for man's salvation. This aspect of the Ascension is literally all-important to us. Where the Saviour is now; what He is thinking, feeling, doing now; and what is the salvation He gives. Is it all in the

legacy form? Is it something He left in the world eighteen hundred years ago, when He went away? Is the story of the Cross literally an old story, like those men tell on winter nights, about things that happened in the olden time? Has Christ lapsed into quiescence? Has He gone away into silent and distant dignity, from which He will only emerge on the day of judgment? Where is He? What is He doing? There was divine love in the world when *He* was in it: is there as much divine love in the world now? There was power to save when the thief was taken from the cross into Paradise: is there as much power to save now? We may answer with full assurance—that never when He was on earth did He wield such power, or grace in such fulness, as He does now in

heaven. Rest, such as we long for and get, He never needs. He rests in His love ; but His love is an active principle—busy, vigilant, eternal. He suffers no more of physical pain or mental anguish, as on earth ; but that suffering is a continual offering in heaven. He teaches no disciple now, by living voice ; but He teaches tens of thousands by His Spirit. He companies no more as mortal man with mortal men ; but who can tell how many burning hearts there are on life's highway, because of the felt presence of the Invisible Master ?

In the Roman Churches they light the lamp and hang it in their sacred place, that every one who comes in may, beholding it, know that the great Presence fills the church ; and they offer the so-called sacrifice of the Mass, teaching men to believe that

the Saviour is *always* suffering, always dying. These great errors spring from great truths. There *is* an eternal character about the sufferings of Christ. He is an high priest for ever ; He is in heaven, the most holy place—the central sanctuary of the universe ; but His “real presence” is also with His Church on earth, the blessed company of all faithful people. And observe He offers now—not merely the virtue of an *old* sacrifice made on Calvary, but He presents it filled with the same spirit of justice, and hatred of sin, and love of God, and passion for man’s salvation, which constituted the soul of the sacrifice when it was offered.

That little lamp, shimmering in the gloom of the Roman Church ! It is a poor thing in itself. But I would not put it out. It shall burn

there for me, until they put it out themselves, until they feel that, lamp or no lamp, His presence is wherever there are seeking souls, not in temples made with hands alone, but in the great temple of His universal Church.

It was expedient for His disciples that He should go away. It was far better for them than if He had stayed. Was it not better? Did they not become in every sense better men, and that very soon—more courageous, more consistent, more tolerant, more charitable, more intelligent? And it is expedient for us that He should be where He is—at God's right hand—it is better for us not to see Him while we work than to see Him. “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.” If we can believe this one thing: that Jesus Christ, just as He was here—with

tenderness as gentle, with love as fervent, with sympathy as large, with a heart as easily moved, with a hand as full of blessing—is in Heaven for us; touching the sources of life and the springs of power, and having at command and in gift for sinful men all that is fatherly and gracious in God: if we can believe this fact, simply and thoroughly, then all is well with us. Difficulties will assail us, trouble and sickness will weary us, and our hearts will be heavy sometimes and dark with remaining sin; but all that is only for a little while—“He will not leave us comfortless; He will come to us. Let not our hearts be troubled!”

And also, and this is the best thing, He will come again and take us to Himself, that where He is, at the right hand of God, there we may be

also. He will not only come in the coming of grace; He will come some day, not long hence, for the very last time, and say to us, "I am coming no more to you; you are coming now home to me." This also is signified by the Ascension of Christ. "He was received up into heaven," that He might carry thither our best affections, our desires, our hopes, our hearts. If He had remained on earth, His disciples never could have been drawn to heaven. They would have thought, and they would have had reason to think, heaven to be where He was. To die and leave Him *here*, living on in visible presence—that would not have been to them a joyful change! Methinks they would have been eager to come back from heaven to earth in order to recover His society. Therefore, as soon as He was partially

revealed, even before He was fully known, He went away. He did not send one of His personal disciples on before Him; He went *first* Himself. It was His own hand that drew aside the veil. He entered then as the forerunner for us, and we could not but enter in heart and hope with Him. And now dying is but following Him home; “falling asleep” in Him; going to be with Him, which is “far better;” claiming our hidden life; going to the inhabitation of our “prepared place.” He was received into heaven that He might accomplish all this for us; not only prepare the inheritance for the heart, but the heart for the inheritance.

It is as when tidings come to a house or to a hamlet, of some goodly land far off, where the soils are kindly, where the air is balmy, where fruits are

abundant. "Why should we not go?" perhaps one and another will say. This is but a rocky land in comparison; labour is hard with us here, and winter sharp, and harvests scanty." But yet no one goes for a while. They have their interests all about them, such as they are; they are dear to each other, and the presence of friends makes the chief element of home.

But at length, some day when they look not for it, a leader—the father of the house, or the elder brother, or the chief man of the village—sails away. He is gone! and they wait for news of his arrival. And then they read his letters containing a description of the country; and there begins to grow in their hearts a kind of second home to them beyond the seas. And he writes for one and another

to come, and he sends the means to bring them, and by and by the whole family—the whole hamlet perhaps—emigrate to the place which has become to them now their real home.

So Jesus went first to heaven, that it might be indeed the very home of His people; and they have been going to Him ever since—one, and another, and another, without ceasing; and heaven now is very rich—rich in good men, rich in all that good men value—but above all, rich in the continual presence of its Lord.

Rise we, then, to heaven with our Risen Saviour! Let our citizenship be there! Be it our home indeed! Our treasure-house, into which are gathered our best thoughts, our best hopes, our best affections, our best friends.



“He knoweth thy walking through
this great wilderness.”¹

“HE KNOWETH.” He, and many a time He only. Men walk through life quite near to each other, even side by side, knowing little or nothing of each other’s troubles. Some of these troubles are shadowy and impalpable in form, or they are silent and secret; things never spoken about, and on that account the heavier to carry. Fellowship and sympathy are very precious; but they have their own sphere and “bounds which they cannot pass.” There are heart-burdens which cannot be lifted and laid upon other hearts,

¹ Deut. ii. 7.

however true and faithful these may be. Mile after mile, step by step, the individual traveller must plod along the way—footsteps of comrades and fellow-pilgrims sounding in his ears the while, their pleasant conversation helping him in many things—while yet in other things he and they are aloof and separate. “Each man must bear his own burden,” the burden which is essentially his own, and cannot be transferred; or the burden which he makes his own, by some peculiar delicacy or inwardness or independence of mind. Each one is thus in some of his trouble darkly—sublimely alone

To one in such circumstances there can hardly be any consideration of more encouraging import than that contained in the phrase “*He knoweth.*” The full sense is not brought out by our English word “knoweth” taken

baldly. The word means, as used in other parts of the Old Testament, "to observe carefully," "to trouble one's self" about a thing. Thus the full meaning is that God knows—carefully observes, concerns, and even troubles Himself—about our life and our varying experiences.

The figurative expression, "in the wilderness," is true of some lives much more than of others; true of the same human life at one time much more than at another. If I am a man of the world, purely, and nothing more—not in my spirit a stranger and a pilgrim to something beyond—I am not likely to regard this world as a wilderness. It is my home and portion—not perhaps in all respects satisfactory to me, or even nearly so—but, as I think, capable of being improved so immensely that I shall seek no other

home and need no other portion. On the other hand, he who has in him the true life, which rises to God and is nourished on truth and purity and goodness, will feel in a moment that this world can, under no conditions, be his portion and rest. It may be this or it may be that, as change waves her wand and events of endless variety come trooping at her call: a school of instruction; a sphere of adventure; a mountain of joy; a vale of tears; but some touch of the wilderness will be in it all. Evanescence will be written on it, and the thought will be irresistible and not unpleasant—“Through all this I must go, not only in fact by the lapse of my days, but in faith by the bent of my spirit. I have dissatisfactions which the world can never allay; ambitions which it can never satisfy; in spirit

and aim I must go onwards whatever befall."

Acknowledgment of this aspect of human life meets us in unexpected ways. Hardly does a great man die, but we read in some notices of the event, intimations or hints of sorrows he had been bearing, of which perhaps the world knew nothing—"He was gifted beyond his peers, a man of searching intellect and commanding powers, but he had great family griefs." Or—"He was gracious in manner, eloquent of speech, frank and generous in action, and all his accomplishments were sanctified by a sincere piety; but in such and such respects he was a sorely-tried man, and the rest he has reached now will not be unwelcome." What is true of the more conspicuous human pilgrims is also true of the undistinguished. Whose is the

heart that knows no secret bitterness during its thirty or forty years ? Whose is the home, if it be composed of many members and radiating branches, into which some deep shadows have not entered ? " Man is born to trouble," and each man is liable, through the inwardness and secrecy of some part of his trouble—ignorant the while of the possibly similar, or even severer sorrow of others around him—to feel as if he were left to suffer peculiarly alone. Sadder yet, and worse, he allows himself to feel at times as if God had forgotten him. Some of the most moving and marvellous words in all the Bible are words of God, spoken in remonstrance,—and as though in pain,—through having been grievously wronged by such distrustful thoughts. Why sayest thou this, O Jacob, and why speakest thou thus, O Israel ?

Thy judgment is *not* passed over from thy God, nor thy way hidden, nor thy trouble, nor any thing that pertains to thee. "He knoweth thy walking." He troubleth Himself divinely about thy poor human sorrow. He goes with thee, step by step, still caring, still watching, never sleeping, never weary, never discouraged in His work. "The God of all comfort" wipes the tears from the faces of His children, even here, saying to many a one in the lonely silence, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." "He knoweth." Thank God and take courage!

But it is well to remember that in our journey through life we are refreshed and strengthened by mercies as special as the troubles are, and that these are not only known to

God, but prepared by Him in anticipation of our need.

There are mercies for us every day. We are loaded with benefits. Our life is no one thing exclusively; it would be smaller and poorer if it were. A sigh! That is not our life. A song! That is not our life. But there is more in human life of the song than the sigh, if we only know how to draw out the notes and make the harmony. And in every life there are special mercies. "Israel came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm-trees, and encamped there by the waters." Oh, ye wells and palm trees of Elim, probably long since dried and faded, still flow and flourish to our sight, and tell us of the providing mercies of God! *He* prepared the palm-trees, and the wells deep and cool, long before Israel

reached them ; and when the people were plodding wearily over the burning sand, up the hot treeless valleys, and beside the bitter waters of Marah, He had waiting for them the sweet fountains and the cool shades. Thus God “prevents” His children with the blessings of His goodness. We get to-day the fruit of some ancient thoughts and operations of God. Long before your birthday He was thinking of the years that were coming, and preparing for them : sowing seed to spring up in due season in your life. God has been sowing,—and now you are going to school. God has been sowing,—and, school-days over, you are going into an office, or you are going to college, and putting your hand to the business of your manhood. God has been sowing,—and you are going to be married ; young per-

haps, and before you thought of it ; or a little older, and after you had almost believed it possible you might go through life alone. God has been sowing,—and you are succeeding in your work ; and, better still, doing something for others, for their comfort here and their welfare eternally. “He knoweth thy walking,” and to remember this will enhance all joy and assuage all sorrow.

And He knows how long our walking in the wilderness is to be ; and where and when and how it will end. Here the analogy between Israel’s pilgrimage and ours hardly holds. Israel marched always in a body : in a body they crossed the river and entered the promised land. We no doubt in a sense also march together through the wilderness, but each of us enters Canaan alone. No priestly

feet tread the Jordan of death before the following host: for they are but pretenders to divine priestly power, who come to the dying with professed absolution and viaticum. Stand back, presumptuous men! Stand back from the dark river of death, and let God's pilgrims come to it alone! Alone, and yet not alone. Stand aside—that they may see Him who commands the river in all its extent, its depths and shallows alike, and who has said that He will Himself go with each one in crossing it. He “liveth and was dead,” He knows the waters at their deepest and darkest, and He is “alive for evermore,” and has “the keys of Hades and of death.”

• How many years remain to me?
He knoweth. How will the way be in future, smoother or rougher?

What companionship will there be, the same which I have now to the end? Or shall I live to see my dearest fellow-pilgrims going on before me, while I, left behind, sing mournfully—

“They have all passed into that world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here”?

He knoweth. Shall I be long in the process of dying? Shall I suffer much pain, or shall I pass as in a sleep into the great eternal world? *He knoweth;* and therefore I need not know. For if He knows, He rules. If God knows what is to happen to each, it can only be because He rules what we call providence, so that it shall happen so. A contingent, uncertain thing, which may be this way or that way, never can be known.

Again, if He knows, He provides.

He will not leave nor forsake until He hath done that which He hath spoken to me of—"Their bread shall be given; their water shall be sure." Bread—enough; flesh or manna. Water—water of Marah, now and again a little bitter, but the sweetening tree will be near at hand to cast in; or water of Elim; or water from the Rock.

Raiment too—enough. Not so much of it in some instances as self-estimation would desire. Not the new suit very often, perhaps, but the old lasting out well. In that strange wilderness journey "their raiment waxed not old upon them." Is there any analogy to that in our life now? Yes, there is. Enough by care and patient thrift, is really better than enough by repletion or by miracle.

He knows—then He loves. Why

should He keep His people in mind, and rule, and provide, and watch, and care, if He did not love them? This is the sum of all—He hath loved us “with an everlasting love;” and having so loved us, He will love us “to the end.”

“*He knoweth thy walking*—then walk on!”



Bearing the Cross.

To take up the cross and follow Christ is an old condition of discipleship, but it is a condition which has not changed with changing time.

It still stands written “He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me.” The generation of to-day sometimes seems to have found an easier way of following Christ. “Our fathers were good men and true, but very narrow ; we are more liberal.” Yes—you are ! They did not know that Christianity means culture ; they thought it meant Redemption. They did not see that

self-sacrifice was compatible with all kinds, and nearly all degrees of amusement. You are making these pleasant discoveries. All places, and all companies, and all hours are permitted now, and nearly all engagements! With a zest the more that it is in some sense a new freedom, Christian people are found to-day almost leading the way into worldly conformity. Let us have a care; we may discover too much. We may run too far along the line of a universal conciliation. It is still impossible to serve God and mammon; it is still necessary to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. We must still go forth unto Christ without the camp, bearing His reproach,—forth from our pleasures, and our profits, and our loves, and our likings, and all our easy ways,—forth into the colder air, and

along the hard path of self-denial. As He left Jerusalem behind Him when He went to Calvary, so must the whole world be left behind us when we go forth into true Christian service.

Not excluding other thoughts on this subject, let us think these.

When we shrink and draw back, when we look for the easier path, when we whisper to our hearts, "The lower life will do to-day,"—let us remember that in proportion as we yield to the ignoble suggestion, we sow the seed of future misery,—seed which will perhaps spring up very rapidly, and lay its black harvest of grief at our feet. So the seeming relief is only a gilded trouble, only a cross in disguise. Flee from Christ's appointed cross, and it is more than likely you are fleeing fast to another, harsher and heavier far,—a cross which

none will help you to bear, and which will cleave to your conscience until you come back trembling beneath its weight to His feet again—with the earnest penitent prayer that He would give you once more His own yoke which is easy, and His burden which is light. A true disciple is happily in a worse position in this respect than a man who has never known the Saviour's grace. The carnal man can make something of this world, or he thinks he can, for a little. He can forget ; he can seize the passing joy ; he can adopt the lower views of duty ; he can shut out to-morrow, and glorify to-day. But you cannot, if you have been with Christ. Never again can you raise the natural life into the place of the spiritual ; never can you have anything but a transient happiness in separation from Him.

Peter sought the lower road for relief on that dark night when he denied his Master; and for a moment the fire by which he stood would seem to burn more cheerfully, and the dark faces around him would cease to lower, and his heart cease to beat so wildly, and his connection with Christ would seem to pass as a dream. The dream broke like a tempest, and the reality came back in one mighty wave of sorrow; when his Master with a look melted Peter's heart, and he went out into the darkness and "wept bitterly."

Think again—that in bearing our cross we are getting our strength. The hardness we endure as good soldiers of Jesus Christ leaves more power of endurance behind; and in no way but this can we reach to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Him. Never along soft and

easy pathways can we rise to yonder mountain top! We must toil up the rough slopes of the hill, through shade and sunshine, before we can breathe the purest air and gaze on the farthest prospect. Let us try to think, when the cross is hard: "This is my strength. He who lays it on me will take care that it is not too heavy, and that I have not to bear it too long. I take it that I may grow up to Him in all things who is the Head."

Again—let us think: "I am bearing my cross *for Christ*." It often seems to be made for us by others—by neighbours, by relatives, by those of our own house, or by the world, or by circumstances. It is really made by Christ. It is from Him we receive it, and it is for Him we bear it; and when we think of this, the cross ought to be dear to our hearts. Even if the

bearing of it did not work out any ultimate happiness—if it did not promote the growth of spiritual strength—if it were pure sacrifice without recompense—still, “*For Christ's sake*” ought to reconcile us to all. “*For Christ's sake*” we say in many a prayer. “*For Christ's sake*” should be whispered in our heart at the hardest of our duties, and along the darkest of our way.

Another thought: Christ will be very near us when we carry our cross. “*Follow Me*,” He says; but He does not mean that He is on far before us—quite or almost out of sight. “When He putteth forth His own sheep He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.” They follow Him close and near; following is at an end if He is out of sight. The air around us is vocal

with the Good Shepherd's voice, the grass is yet rising from His tread, when we plant our footsteps in the track of His! So near is Christ when we are following on. If we are wandering, or loitering, or casting off the burden, or shrinking from the task, or saying, "No! Not the cross, not the cross to-day!" then the distance between Him and us grows large and dark. But if we are bending our shoulder patiently to the yoke ; grasping the staff fast for the journey ; raising the cup with trembling hand to our lips—He is *very near* to us then. He cannot leave, He cannot forsake us then. He must forget the garden, and the brook, and the mocking trial, and the scourging, and the crown of thorns, and His own cross on Calvary, before He can fail to console and strengthen us in the bearing of ours.



“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation.”¹

A MAN going through this world to a better, or indeed going through it at all, is never without tribulation. Sometimes it sinks out of view for a little, and out of memory; but again it gathers, and glooms like a wintry storm, and girds him round, and drinks up the sunshine and the joy of life.

“*All our tribulation!*” It is not something introduced forcibly and with difficulty into a human life. It is rather something *in* this life which God can touch at any time, and the

¹ 2 Cor. i. 4.

soul thrills with anguish, and the eyes overflow with tears. Quite close to a man's daily life—wrapped up, indeed in the heart of it—there lies a capacity of suffering, silent elements of sorrow, which a touch may develop into actual pain. It needs but a change in the circumstances around them to bring men into this condition, to put them in the heart of this dark phrase, "All our tribulation." The sinking of a ship, the burning of a house, the giving way of a blood-vessel, the breaking of an arm, the sickening of a child. Or far smaller things than these: the non-arrival of a letter, a lapse of memory on the part of a friend, the turning of a corner, the speaking of a word, will bring the tribulation, or will greatly aggravate that which was already present.

There is a poor shallow theory of

religion which makes it all happiness, and regards tribulation as an alien thing. Rather is it true that there is a cup which none can drink of but those who are near the great Sufferer; a baptism which comes only to the believing heart; a sorrow which a man might almost *long* to have. For to be a Christian is to have increase of sensibility; it is to be quick, sensitive, soon touched with pain; it is to have a heart made ready with a special preparation for sorrow. And so we read that the sufferings of Christ "abound" in His people; they are made "partakers" of them, they are in "fellowship" with them.

Let us indeed beware lest we misrepresent the providence of God, or narrow His plan, which is large and very various. Some—they are the fewest number—do pass through life

with very little sense of a great need of consolation. They are glad souls, who go by light ways, or they are calm, tranquil souls, who go by quiet ways, to eternal rest and glory. Still, it is true of most of God's children that they have familiar acquaintanceship with sorrow in some of its many forms.

But we read, "God comforteth us." Comfort is, you see, set over against tribulation, or rather it is joined to it, hard and fast. Let the two go together! They are old comrades, they have been together these six thousand years. God has joined them; they are near of kin, they are lovingly agreed. But for the tribulation, the consolation could never be. Still, the question arises, how does this divine comfort come to us? For answer, we may say that the whole world is full

of it. The whole economy in which we live is healing. Only come into trouble, and if you are a Christian in your trouble, in that moment you begin to come into consolation.

There falls down suddenly from the far upper sky in spring, a stream or baptism of polar cold and frost—and the young leaf is shrivelled, and the blossom is nipped and the bud shrinks back in fear; and men, especially those who are most concerned, say that the wealth of a season is lost, that an incurable wound has been inflicted.

Incurable! God has called in the physicians already; not, as so often among men, to consult and then separate, finding they can do nothing. *He* calls in His physicians actually to heal. The sun is healing, every beam is curative! The air is healing, every

breath is consolation ! The rain is healing, touching the leaf softly, sliding down to the roots, and whispering there Nature's sweet and secret word, " Be comforted ! "

A plain is made a battlefield, and all its quiet beauty falls in a day under the havoc and curse of war. Cannon-shot plough the fields—the horses' hoofs tread down the corn—the red streams flow everywhere, and all is ghastly horror. If you come again in a year, you will still indeed see some traces of the dreadful day ; but you will also see the whole scene so covered over with the green mantle of Nature's charity, that you will wonder at the patience and tenderness of God.

Men are building a city ; and they must rend the face of Nature to do it ; they must dig deep, dangerous

quarries, wherever they can find the stone, and leave them like wounds in the landscape. But Nature does not leave them so ; if man will only keep away, with his busy destructive powers, she will soon make a marvellous transformation : here a blooming flower, there a creeping plant ;—here a covering of moss, there a rush of leaves ;—yonder, on the brow of the precipice, with roots struck in among the veins of the solid rock, a waving tree, hiding the deep seam and beautifying it with flickering light and shade.

All this is full of significance ; just so does God work in the spiritual world. He says He is “the God of all comfort,” and Nature with her gentle ministries comes in to confirm the assertion. There comes not one day to a living man that does not bring healing on its wings, if he

will only let it drop down upon him. Sometimes the mere lapse of a day will do it. Time is one of God's ministers of consolation, and brings to some the assuagement and relief which they cannot always find even in thought, or by faith, or by the softening of tears. The pressure laid on human hearts would break them utterly if it were continued in its intensity, and if Time had no mitigating power.

Change of scene also has a great effect in yielding its own kind of comfort. It sometimes induces a change of feeling. The hills, the rivers, the fields, the sea, the sky, often bring a gentle consolation to which hearts unconsciously yield.

The discharge of duty, whether from choice or compulsion; the forth-putting of the energies—although it

may be enforced at first, and may seem to the sorrowing spirit to be almost a cruel mockery—will yet give solace and strength.

The arrival of a friend will often bring marvellous consolation, as Paul found when he was “comforted by the coming of Titus ;” and by a sacred law of sympathy, men find relief and forget their own griefs in ministering to the sorrows of others.

These are some of what may be called the common consolations, but even these are all of God, who is the God of *all* comfort.

But God has far more direct ways of communicating light and help than these. As He can bring trouble by a touch, so He can dispel it by a touch again. He often gives consolation by *a thought*, one thought perhaps, which changes everything. It may be a

thought about the infallible rectitude and wisdom of His own actions, in which the reeling and sorely-shaken soul is able to rest at last; or it may be a thought about Jesus Christ, the great High Priest—about His nearness, His human sympathy, His brotherhood with men in sorrow as in joy; or it may be a thought about the future life, bright as the resurrection morning, calm as heaven itself.

God can comfort by leading the soul into a state of *feeling*, without even seeming to use thought at the time as the instrument of producing it. By the direct contact of His Spirit with the spirit of the human sufferer, He can shed abroad a wonderful peace.

And best of all He can draw the troubled one to Himself, and when consolation has been sought in vain

at all the streams, He can give it—deep and pure and strong—from the eternal fountain in Himself. Many a time has God thus taken distressed souls into His own pavilion, and soothed and comforted and laid them to rest on His bosom—even as a nurse cherisheth her children, or as a mother sings her sobbing child to sleep.

And let us remember that these are times that may come to any of us; and that one time is certainly coming to each, when *only* this will do,—nothing less! A time may come when Nature with all her gentle ministries will seem hard and cold; when Providence with all its kindly compensations will seem mechanical and oppressive; when Time is only prolonged anguish or weariness; when the help of man is vain; when the very Bible seems powerless to comfort. Oh! *then* go

right up, by the open way, to the throne of grace: farther still—to the very heart of God, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort, and there find relief from the burden, the anguish, the mystery of your life.

And here, as in other things, the principle holds: Give and have—keep and lose. God-like, let what comes to you flow from you; and there shall be given to you *as* you give—“good measure.” Miser-like, get, and grip, and hold; and lo! what should be shining wealth to your soul will be corrupted and defiled. Try hard for comfort, simply and solely because it is pleasant to be happy; and God will probably postpone your comfort; He will lift it away, and keep it for you in the future, and lead you up to it by the way of self-sacrifice. But when that path is really trodden, when the

disciple follows in the Master's steps, carrying the cross when it must be borne, and drinking the sorrow of life when it comes, yet helping others to bear their burdens, and shedding some joy on their way—then life becomes a better, nobler thing, and in some poor measure like the life of the Master, who poured out, from His personal sorrow, and from dark fountains of anguish, rivers and far-flowing waves of immortal joy.



“**N**ot one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake.”¹

STANDING by the manger of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary, we may say, with a confidence which could only be produced by those great scenes—as we argue from the past to the future—“Not ought hath failed of any good thing,” or *can* fail now. All needful good will be supplied. All real evil will be overcome. All the sin of every penitent and believing soul will be forgiven and washed away. All indwelling sin will be overcome and destroyed; if not in a day, yet

¹ Josh. xxiii. 14.

“little by little,” as Israel overcame the Canaanites. And strength will increase, and direction will be sent, and sorrow chased away, and comfort given, and all outward things so ruled that they must work together for good. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, *how* shall He not”—*how?*—“with Him freely give us all things?”

In this supreme position, now for a moment look at the past and future of your own life.

The Past. What do you say of it? Has ought of any good God-promised thing failed you? I do not ask you whether *you* have failed on your own part to see, to claim, to conquer, or to possess the divine things promised and waiting. Alas! one knows the answer to any such questioning as that. Like Israel, through your own

slackness, you have not possessed the goodly land that was opened to you by divine beneficence. But has God failed you? Has He drawn back in anything? Has He ever been unjust? Has He ever been ungenerous? Has He been unkind or even forgetful, so that you were left without His ever-present care? Speak the truth. What is your feeling about this? We are apt to seize quickly upon what *ought* to be our feeling, and to put that forth into expression as real. In a shop window sometimes you see a notice of something that may be had within; but on inquiry you find it is all sold, or it has not come to hand,—the external promise has failed and the fulfilment is not there. Is it so now with us in highest things? What is your real feeling about the way God has led you?

Speak truly and perhaps you will have to say : " Well, there has been failure here and there all along. I am not charging God with unfaithfulness, for I deserve nothing at His hands. I do not wish to complain ; I should not have said anything if you had not put me to the question, and on my honour for the answer. And I must say, (God forgive me, for I know it is wrong !) but still I do feel that things might have been different, and *better*. God has not done the very best for me He could have done. Oh, the sorrow I have had ! The bitter blinding tears I have shed ! The prayers I have sent up as into a black empty sky, without answer ! The withering disappointment which has left my heart dumb and blind ! The heavy loss in worldly things, from which I can never now hope to recover ! Oh, the weariness

ness both to body and mind, of the ceaseless toil of life, which, after all, hardly enough to get me and my children bread! I know when I reason, or when I open the Book, that God is doing all things well, but I do not feel it. I am afraid I do not really believe it, and I dare not lie, and say that I do."

Perhaps not a few, if they were honest, would speak more or less in this strain, and are really thinking thus very often. Well, can anything be done for such? Yes, assuredly. Not much by reasoning, or we might say: "You are in no position yet to judge of the wisdom and goodness of God's plan for you. You see only a little portion of it; you must wait till the whole is unfolded in its grace and beauty." Nor much by remonstrance; still less by reproach: life is diffi-

cult and sorrowful enough, and needs not words of blame or hardness from those who carry God's message to men. But much may be done by simple truth and faithfulness on both sides.

The simple truth then is, that *you feel so because you are not near enough to the Cross of Christ.* So long as you are quarrelling with the circumstances of your own life as arranged by God, you may depend upon it that you are not fully reconciled to Him by the death of His Son. If you were so reconciled—you would be saved from these miserable distrusts and fears; if you saw that great wonder and gift of love—you would believe that all else, all lesser things, must be right and good; if you saw that Jesus Himself loved you and gave Himself for you, that you might be a holy and

happy creature eternally—you would be ashamed to distrust Him in these smaller things.

The way to victory for all of us, is just the way that leads us up to the Cross. We must leave all our human reasonings, and vain mortal strugglings against this or that which may seem to be adverse, and go away up to Calvary, and there enter into God's new world of love and purity and rest. There—we shall feel at once the greatness of our sin and the completeness of our deliverance ; there—we shall feel the reconciling power of the Cross ; there—we shall learn to trust and love and wait. And all our fears will be composed, and our murmurings heard no more, and our anxieties lulled to rest. A strange but sweet transfiguring light will shine along the pathway of the past, and

especially on all its darker places, revealing in them the grace, the beauty, the usefulness, which were hidden from us when we were there. Knowing the love of Christ, we know everything. And it is impossible that there can be left in us any heart-grudge against providence, or any deep unspoken suspicion of God and His ways, or any feeling inconsistent with filial confidence and grateful love. If I have one clear, full view of the glory and the grace of God in the face of Jesus Christ ; if I feel my life redeemed and held in His, so that because He lives I shall live—here and hereafter—distrust and dissatisfaction in other things will no longer survive ; all that He has done to me in His providence will seem right and good. And the future will no longer be a dim uncertainty or a haunting terror. The

future will be like the past—*sure* to be good. Not aught of any good thing can ever fail, in this world or the next, of all that the Lord hath spoken.



“Set thine house in order.”¹

THIS injunction was given to Hezekiah when he was “sick unto death;” but the duty implied in it belongs to the previous time of health, quite as much as it does to the time of sickness; indeed, it is a duty far better done before sickness comes. In general, the “house” ought to be so set in order during life that it will be like the room or home which is well cleansed and kept day by day, and needs little more than the daily ordering, even for some grand occasion. “*Set thine house in order:*” give command concerning thine affairs;

¹ 2 Kings xx. 1.

and make known thy last will to thy family. At this time Hezekiah had no son; the crown and the kingdom would have to be disposed of; and although they were not his to bequeath, his dying wishes, if dictated by wisdom and prudence, would have much to do with the settlement of the kingdom, and the peaceable establishment of his successor.

We have not crowns and kingdoms to will away—indeed, they are not very desirable heritages—but each has his own house to “set in order,” his or her own affairs to settle, so that if the death-sickness should come suddenly, there may be no hurry and haste about temporal affairs; or if death should come without sickness at all, there may be no confusion, disappointment, anxiety or strife among the survivors.

Have you made your will ? Have you settled your affairs as far as they can be settled ? It is nothing less than a solemn religious duty for every father, mother, master, trade-partner, or person having anything to leave or to arrange, to complete in good time the disposition or bequest of it, according to principles of justice to all concerned. It is a slur on a good man's memory to leave this thing undone when he is called away ; and it is a sad necessity to have all these arrangements to make during the last precious hours, which are *all* needed for affection, and faith, and prayer, and which ought all to be given to those whom we are leaving, and to those to whom we are going.

Following the history of Hezekiah, we would say further, that when sickness has come, and assumes a serious

aspect, it is right to pray—to pray asking recovery and life from God. Yes, even when physicians say that it is all but hopeless to expect recovery; or even when they say that it is impossible that any recovery should be, or any issue but the death-issue. For physicians are not God. They are sometimes mistaken. They come always short of a perfect judgment of the case, which can only be possessed and held by Him who knows all. Divines and theologians have imperfect and often mistaken views of divinity, natural and revealed; it is mere papal presumption to profess anything else—although it be a Protestant who does so. Physicians, even the most accomplished, may misinterpret symptoms, and go wrong in the diagnosis of a case; not in any way laying themselves open to blame,

but simply by the necessary imperfection of even the highest human knowledge. *Therefore pray.* God knows. God can work a recovery little less than miraculous—indeed it cannot be shown except by theory, which must always fall short of certainty, that God does *not* work in some instances what we call miraculous cures. If recoveries take place which science cannot explain, and which science declares to be impossible *until* they take place—science surely ought to be silent for a little, to see if any other explanation be possible. God knows. We come to that always in the end. God lives. God works. He hears His suffering creatures when they cry. And surely they need not perplex themselves by attempting to define accurately in their thought what is possible and what is impos-

sible. He will take care of His own laws. He will do nothing wrong; and He will not fail to do what is right and good. Law, Science, what are they? They are only *the little we know* of God's method of working,—nothing more. Must everything be done according to these? Be it so. Then here is a scientific formula—one of the highest and stablest of the laws of the universe. This: that there is a fixed and efficacious relation between a certain state of the mind, and the exercise of the divine energy upon what we call the laws of matter, as they affect the health of the human body. “Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will answer thee; with long life will I satisfy thee, and shew thee my salvation.”

Unless we are thus to pray in trouble—in apprehension of death—

there are some scriptures meaningless to us; and those among the most intense and fervent in the whole Bible. Why are the Psalms so full of passionate sorrow and fervent prayer; so full of sighs and groans and tears, of heart-meltings and heart-enlargings, of soul-perils and soul-escapes; so full of cries from deep pits, from dark prisons, from sweltering billows, from valleys of the shadow of death,—if we are not, ourselves, to sigh and cry, and weep and pray, and struggle for deliverance in the hour of need—for our own life if it be endangered, or for the life of any dear to us? Why are we admitted into the secret of our Saviour's suffering, when *He* looked on the face of death, and cried, in that natural shrinking from it which He shared with all the human family, as

well as for far deeper reasons—“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me”—but that in our own troubles we may strengthen ourselves by realising His presence, and using His very words? Not the least precious part of our inheritance in the Bible is in these prayers—short, pathetic, pointed—which have been made for us, so to speak, by the suffering of others, and laid up for our use in the time when we shall be “sick unto death.”

“My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me, according to thy word.”

“Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy.”

“Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help.”

“Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

“Oh, spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more.”

And this: “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

We are to ask honestly, fervently, for what we desire, and for what we think will be best—for life, either our own or the life of our friends, but still we are to bound and limit our utmost eagerness by submission to the divine will.

We cannot doubt that such submission was felt by Hezekiah, although it is not here expressed in so many words. “Hezekiah wept sore,” mourning over his diminished days, looking as it were into his own grave; but holding himself ready to pass away, if that should indeed be the fixed and only will of God.

We know that it was otherwise

ordained. He recovered. He recovered in part by the use of means—the means and their results being both in the plan of God.

Many a one is now well who once was ill. Many a one is recovered of his sickness, which at one time seemed to be unto death. And hymns of praise not a few, have been written by such in the book of their subsequent lives. Many a face once turned to the wall is now turned gratefully to the sky. Many eyes once filled with tears of sorrow in the prospect of death, now overflow often with tears of sympathy and love. Many feet once gathered up into the bed, are now busy and tireless in the ways of duty. But ah! how many forget! “We set our mercies under a bushel,” says some one, “and our wants upon a hill.” “Thou shalt *remember* all

the way the Lord thy God hath led thee." Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. If we are comforted, it is that we may comfort others "with the same comfort wherewith we are comforted of God."



“Sealed with that Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance.”¹

A SEAL is not affixed to a useless thing. The great seal of a nation is not used for an unimportant document. So God’s great seal of grace indicates great reality and worth in those on whom it is impressed. A human spirit is essentially so great a thing, that the whole world would not be enough to give in exchange for it. But a human spirit *with God’s grace in it*, a man whose heart contains gracious affections and holy principles is sealed of God by His Spirit, of that He says in effect: “This work of mine is so

¹ Eph. i. 13, 14.

rare and precious that I must not leave it exposed to the tempests and trials of the world without some indication of its worth." And so He puts on it His great seal of the Spirit, and tells the man himself, and others too, in so far as they can be made to understand it, that the very richest and most valued part of all His earthly property is His own work of grace in living men.

To compare the "kingdom of God within us" with anything material, were quite beside the whole question ; but if you compare it with other things of the higher and better kind—things mental and moral among men—you will find that it is peerless and alone. Shakespeare's noblest inspirations are not equal (in themselves) to a Christian's thoughts when he is thinking "in the Spirit." A philosopher's

clearest distinctions, his best considered principles, are not equal to a Christian's practical discernings of good and evil. A soldier's greatest achievements in planning a campaign or fighting a battle are not so good as those lowlier victories, won every day by the followers of Jesus Christ in the fields of common life, and registered by the angels in the heavenly places. And all the loves and links of home and social life, although these are very precious and dear, are yet far inferior to the love which lifts up the soul to Christ, and makes an unseen place our real and eternal home. A human spirit in the grace of God—that is, in real goodness—is the noblest spectacle on which the sun looks down: it is the one thing that God seals.

Among men a seal is essentially a

temporary thing; it is not intended to endure for ever. The will is opened after death; the letter reaches its destination; the casket comes into new hands. In each case the seal is broken. It is held sacred till the time comes for breaking it, and then there is no more hesitation. A seal *never means eternal secrecy*. If there were anything which a man would wish never to be known or opened or used, he would not seal it, he would destroy it; he would let the fire seal it with consuming flame. But a seal always points to a future day, place, or occasion. And so does the sealing of God by the Spirit—“Sealed unto *the day of redemption*.” “The *earnest* of the Spirit.” Futurity is involved in these words. God gives His grace, and that is the pledge and warrant that more grace will be given.

He says, "A small part of the blessedness and glory of a full redemption I give you now. It is little compared with the fulness and brightness of the glory that is to be revealed; but although little in itself, it is great in its relations and issues; it is a living germ which cannot be extinguished, but which will blossom through the summer of eternity."

This is a subject apt to become trite, because we have occasion to speak of it so often, and also because, while speaking of it often, our real knowledge of it is yet very little. We do speak of the great future; we must. Living in a fading world, how can we but speak of that world which will never lose its bloom? Hasting away like shadows, how can we but think and speak of the place to which we are going? And yet how little we

know! We take the help of all the analogies and prefigurations of this life—and they do help us up to a certain point—and then we are left to faith and to God. “The earnest” of this world, which we see issuing and terminating in full payment, give us some help in conceiving the relation of the greater things, but not much; the earthly symbols are too narrow and feeble to express the largeness of the heavenly life.

Take a little flower, the first opening blossom you can find in all the woods, while it is still winter;—that is Nature’s “*earnest*;” and when in four or five months *all* the flowers are blooming, and the woods and gardens are gay;—that is Nature’s willing payment. Or take the green blade—the only one that appears above the red field-mould—that is the “*earnest*” to

the farmer of all the rich plenty of the harvest-day. And when that day shall come—when the corn is yellow and the reapers are many, and the wains are loaded, and the garners are filling, and the farmyard is crowded with stacks, and song greets the morning, and sleep reigns through all the restful night—that is the payment in full of the earnest given long before by that one tender blade of green. And the difference is great between the two. But how much greater between the beginnings of grace and the fulnesses of glory! All the flowers on earth could not bloom into the meaning of *that*, nor all the cornfields, let them wave in what richness they may, tell the full harvest-joy of heaven!

Think of the time God is taking for the ripening of His Church before He proclaims the day of full redemption

come. It is at least six thousand years since the first earnest was given, and there has been no full payment yet. We have had nothing but "ear-nests" during all that time. What must be the fruition when God takes so long a time before it is revealed! Time is always an element in the production of greatness. Months, three or four, will raise a perfect flower out of the bud. As many years will not do the same—there must be centuries—for the sapling of the oak or the cedar. Ah! but when those slow centuries have come and gone, what "trees of God" they are! Then what must that work be in its perfection which was begun in Eden? No man has yet seen *a man*—as he will be on God's "day of redemption." God's men are walking here in disguise: you see their outward forms,

but you do not know the inward substance of the manhood that is to be, "when that which is perfect is come." With the secret treasures of their spiritual life, they pass quickly through the perils of this night of time. But they are all hastening to the time and the place where the Saviour has promised to meet them, and to reveal them to themselves and to one another, and to a wondering universe. They are all going on to the great day of redemption, for which they have the sealing of the Spirit.

Take courage! Your peace is often ruffled ; but it is the true beginning of the eternal Rest. Your song is low, interrupted by sighs and weeping ; but it will rise yet to the loud hosanna. Your love at times seems to catch the chill of winter, and you cannot make it burn ; but that same love will glow

until it becomes vehement enough and pure enough to mingle with the loves of the seraphim. Your steps now sometimes well-nigh slip, and your eye grows dim with darkness, as you try to scan the future; but you are going along the good old way where all the multitudes of God's saints have received their earnest, and you will come at length to the place of full payment—where the "good measure" is given, "pressed down and running over;" where cities are given as wages, and crowns as gifts; where God's kings are robed; where His conquerors have triumphal entry; where His sons and daughters are at home.



“Who shall separate us from the
Love of Christ?”¹

“*It is Christ that died.*” Now we come nearer and nearer to the solemn, glad source and centre of all comfort; and strange to say—yet full of all significance—we approach it through the deep shadows and agonies of death. O Death! thou hast wrapped the world in gloom since ever men lived on it, and kept it bathed in tears, and softly vocal with sighs of sorrowing and breaking hearts! But thou didst come once too often for the security of thine own reign! Thou didst seize one victim too many! A Liberator

¹ Romans viii. 35.

in disguise has entered and gone through thy dark realms, and issuing thence has "led captivity captive." He lived—He died—He rose—He ascended—taking with Him all His affections, and all His energies, and sweet and sacred memories of earth, and the hearts of His people, and the hopes of the world—and there, at the right hand of God, He carries on His work, as a river carries itself on to the sea. He cannot stay Himself in His course without denying Himself and repudiating what He has already done. He who is all compassion, and tenderness, and brotherliness, and motherliness—can He cease to be these things, and retire into His distant glory, heedless of aching human consciences, and darkened human pathways, and terrible struggles, and sorrowful defeats, and breaking hearts? Ay, and of all the

faith-looks and love-longings of His trusting people?

The reply is here in the unanswered question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The main object of St. Paul in this passage is to demonstrate the safety or well-being of those who trust and love and obey the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father through Him. That object is kept in view through this whole 8th chapter of Romans. But the argument becomes nervous, rapid, condensed in these closing verses. It lifts the believing soul higher and higher yet, in a series of ascensions, away from death and danger, until at last the very summit of the mount of confidence is reached. And what is this place of supreme safety, where toiling, tired men can rest, and breathe easily, and look all around without

fear, and lie down to sleep in quiet joy? It is the love of Christ, when we are apprehended by it, and held in it; searched and purified by its fires, and healed by its breathings, and touched in our secret souls, now to sorrow and then to longing, by its tenderness. For if we are thus held in love—that is, if we have a strong persuasion that Christ the Son of God loves us, notwithstanding our unworthiness and unbelieving fears and loveless ways, really does love us with a great love, and cares for us with a great and constant care—then we are forgiven, and our place of defence is stronger than the munition of rocks; higher than Horeb, the old mount of God, lying well up towards the everlasting hills and the City that hath no need of the sun.

We usually associate safety with

power or strength, actively or passively used on our behalf. And God is strong. All the forces of the universe radiate from Him, and if His power is round about us surely we ought to feel safe. But the truth is we do *not* feel safe and well, simply by such an assurance. Let us make a further advance, and take the moral attribute of Divine justice, settled and fixed amid all truth-relations. If that attribute is on our side, then we are ethically safe, there is "no condemnation" to us if we are in Christ Jesus. This by itself would make us "feel better," to use a common phrase, but not even this would make us feel "all well" in our deepest emotions, in our immortal spirit-life, in that which beats and breathes and lives in us, as well as in that which thinks and knows. We feel not yet the drawing of the

inseparable bond. We are yet full of a strange, tender, unsatisfied longing. We listen for a word. We are as those who go out to the gate to look and wait, and then come in disappointed, yet resolved to go out again, and if need be again—listening for the footfall, for the voice! In the houses of our earthly experience, and at the gates of our knowledge, and along the roads of our inquiry and our expectation, are we not as those who go out to listen? Especially is it so when there is an eventide to us in Providence, and eventide brings shadow and wonder and fear and touches of pain; and one and another are ready to speak and say, “Oh, if some one, All-good, did but care for me, and would deign to make with me a friendship—surpassing all human friendships—*then* I could at length sleep in peace; I could

almost lie down and die in thankfulness and heart-content!"

Here is the answer to your longing, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" His love touches what is deepest in us, and opens the inner secret-door of the very adytum of the soul. His love melts and overcomes what is hardest in us, and worst—our self-will, our low preferences, our poor spiritless submission to the world, and even our mad love of its pleasures, or our idolatrous worship of its dignities. All this can be overcome, not by argument, not by wisdom, but by the force of a counter-attraction, by what has been called "the expulsive power of a new affection;" by the love that has dared, that has laid itself out with uncalculating prodigality of beneficence, that has gone through sorrow and shame and swimming

agonies of death — for its objects. This love will nullify for us and make us strong enough to resist the power of all "separating" things. We need not run through the black list particularly ; they stand in grim array, not a picture of imagination, but a simple record of apostolic experience. And since Paul's day multitudes have been pressed in "tribulation," borne down by "distress," assailed by "persecution," emaciated with "famine," chill in "nakedness," living in "peril," cut in pieces with the "sword;" but not one has ever been by any of these things, nor by all of them together, separated from the love of Christ : in many an instance they have confirmed the faith they have assailed, and but broadened the security they have tried to overthrow.

We live a life to-day distinguished

and sometimes made very sad by incessant separations. The separating agents can hardly be numbered: time separates; distance separates; success separates; money separates; even friendship separates—a new friendship dissolves an old one; and great joy, and deep trouble, and all-dissolving death. The fashion of this world (and we are part of it as mortal creatures) is ever passing away. We are for ever saying our farewells, in what we do as much as in what we speak; and it is not wonderful that men without faith should say, “This world is only shadow and show and dream and mockery.” It must be more or less pain and grief to any man, until he casts soul-anchor within the veil—until his life beats upwards towards its source and fulness in the bosom of Christ—until he yields

himself to the pull of the inseparable bond.

You young people ! you have wings as well as feet, and you will fly : from youth, from home, some of you from country ; and new scenes, new friends, new duties, and new joys will be yours ; and new sorrows, from which you will not seek to escape when they come to you in the providence of God : for who would wish to do less than stand in his own lot, and live the life that is God-given ?

But if you will, you may, amid all the goings out and comings in of life, have "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother," and you may humbly but confidently abide in the everlasting love of Christ.

And you—who through age, or infirmity, or sickness, or mere heart-weariness, are beginning to think of

the last and greatest severance of all, and to think you see some shadow of its coming,—you begin to see that this great wheel, the world, which is continually engaged in the dissipation of energy, and the rupture of ties, and the wearing down of human toil and achievement, is about, ere long, in one of its revolutions, to cast you off and away for ever—out of the hearing of mortal speech, out of the sight of land and sea; the earthly part sinking quietly down into the dust, but the spiritual part, the part that is *you indeed*, passing into the invisible and eternal state. On so great a journey, what lamp of wisdom bear you in your hand to guide you through a darkness that science can discover but cannot dispel! What charm, what spell, take you in your heart, to bear you on and through to safety and home once

more? Heard you ever of any word, written in literature, or spoken by priests, or held silently in human thought, that will bear comparison with this—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"



“**H**e hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted.”¹

A GREAT deal of Divine considerateness is disclosed in this division of humanity into classes. Here we have, in this passage alone, “the poor, the captive, the blind, the bruised, the broken in heart.” In such words Christ seems to come nearer to us than in the wider offers of His grace. He touches us with a gentler, homelier sympathy; He describes our case; He tells what aileth us, what our grievous disadvantage is and what our need. And as He speaks we feel

¹ Luke iv. 18.

that He who can so individualise His patients can be no pretender to divine skill, but must indeed be the Heavenly Physician Himself.

He died of a "broken heart," we sometimes say, but the expression more usually refers to those who from one cause or another are crushed, bruised, weighed down, or discouraged. If we take some instances from among these, we may the better see how the Physician heals.

First of all—temperament is something. There are some who advance into this world, where we must all live our life for a while, timorously and with a kind of pain. Something seems to fill them with apprehension. They know nothing of the elastic step. They do not stand in the bold attitude, or wear the sunny face, or hum the song of happy carelessness. They

are mostly in the shadow, and the burden of life is heavy to them. And others cannot lighten it for them to any great extent; for no one man, however sympathetic or skilful he may be, can relieve another man of his own being. We cannot exchange natures. Each must be himself all through, and a desponding temperament is sometimes a sad inheritance. You see some persons bending, crushed and almost broken-hearted, under outward circumstances which would scarcely move them if they had a cheerful temper and a hopeful disposition of mind.

The serious view of life is certainly the right one; eminently so for these times, when amusement and frivolity are sweeping through every circle of society. But to live in a continual atmosphere of gloom can be good for

no human soul. A good deal may be done sometimes by attention to health, by cheerful society, by wise occupation, or change of scene ; but perfect and effectual relief comes only from Him who is the Maker and also the Healer of our spirits ; and a real trust in Christ, although it will not change a morbid temperament into a sanguine one, will have a beneficial effect even on bodily health.

But melancholy or fear does not spring only from feeble health : it is a shadow cast out of the spirit-world ; it is the bending of a sinful human creature before God's immutable law ; it is the half-conscious sorrow of a soul for its unknown loss ; it is a tribute to the reality and the majesty of a future life. And all this makes it clear that only He who commands both worlds, the seen and the unseen ;

and both times, the brief present and the long future, can speak and carry home the needed consolation. In healing; He sometimes seems at first to aggravate the malady: He pushes the disease on to its crisis; amid deep sorrows of repentance He brings the day-dawn and the beginning of the long-lost joy; till from acts of faith and trustful communion with Himself spring hope and love and peace.

Again: disappointment plays a large part in human life, in bringing the shadows down upon men, in crushing their native hopefulness, abating their natural spirits, and bruising their hearts, strive as they may against the process. Every day some bright vision that has lightened and refreshed the poor pilgrim's eyes for years is fading away; and if from

mere habit or fond memory he thinks of it for a few brief moments of happy forgetfulness, as a thing yet possible to be realised, his waking dream ends in a start of pain or a moan of sorrow. Every day some strong workers see the labours of years, which have been slowly, carefully, and as they thought effectually built up and secured—melting away before the great forces of the world, the waves and tides of life, just as if they were so much sand. Every day fathers and mothers are looking on their children growing up, and remembering with a sadness they cannot suppress, how some recent losses and calamities will affect their future, giving them a much less advantageous outset in life than they had hoped to secure for them. And there are deeper disappointments yet; when the children grow up amid

many privileges and advantages, without using them; when they even throw them to the winds and like him of old, who, alas! still stands as true type for so many, waste their substance in some far country of sin.

People are often disappointed, and make a serious trouble about things which ought to affect them much less than they do: marriages which do not go to their minds; social connections formed or dropped against their desire; changes which they think unnecessary or disadvantageous. And this disappointment, among others, often comes: events happen almost as was expected and desired, and yet the happiness and satisfaction which were confidently believed to be within that framework of things are not there. The box opened—is empty! Letters of correspondence between outward

providence and the heart have been interchanged for many a day, and seemed to promise a great property of joy coming in a while into heart-possession ; but the final letters come, and they are occupied only with explanations, or apologies for non-fulfilment ; or perhaps they contain nothing beyond the hard announcement that there are " no effects." A deep disappointment this ! To see the waters shining from afar, and to toil across the sandy desert to reach them, and then to find them brackish or muddy—or non-existent—only waters in the air !

The greatest disappointment of all is with ourselves. We sometimes seem to be passing on swiftly to the end of all our hopes and endeavours ; we feel as if on the bosom of a river, which is making for itself a

straight and swift passage to the sea :—when lo ! it turns its whole volume the other way, and sweeps far inland, winding among dark mountains, roaring through the gorge, dashing over the cataract, and wandering many a rough and weary mile before it finds the rest it seeks. An image this of our life when its current seems to set backwards—away from heaven and holiness. Do you say that most Christians do not appear to feel this, that very many are satisfied with themselves and with their life ? It may be so ; but there are more longing weary souls than *you* know of ; none but God, who reads quick thoughts, and catches faintest sighs, and knows all hidden things, can know how many eyes are weary, now and again, with looking for the “City which hath foundations,” how many

hearts are home-sick, aching with the great desire to be made "meet for the inheritance of the saints." When we sadly fail and come far short in the noblest aims and best purposes of our life, when we see our ideal far above us, as we toil wearily and almost hopelessly up the steep, how much in this and in the other conditions already indicated, do we need the Healer!

And the Healer is near. All these crushing sorrows lie beneath His hand. He knows how we are affected by them; how they weaken and discourage us and leave us, ere ever we are aware, among those who are crushed and bruised; and He says to us, if we will but hear, "There is help, there is healing for you. I am sent to heal the broken-hearted."

How does Christ heal in such cases? We must always remember that the

healing of Christianity can only come into a human life as Christianity itself comes. We must take the whole cure, or we shall not feel it perfectly in any of its parts. Keeping this in mind, we shall find Christ's healing, and the returning health which that healing brings, in such ways as these.

We shall be taught to know, and more and more to believe, that there is in all things, and especially to us in those things which distress and disappoint us, a perfect will of God. Happiness is really a thing of wills ; it is all comprehended in the issue that shall come of a conflict between God's will and ours. If our will do not yield, the heart-breaking will come soon or late. If God's will be accepted, then come healing, cheerfulness, strength,—to find expression

in everlasting worship and obedience and joy.

Christianity also brings this sublime antidote to all the griefs and heart-aches which come to us from temporal disappointments ; it sets before us those things in which no disappointment can ever be ; it tells us that this world is shadow, and we find it so ; it tells us also that there is just beyond it and to be reached safely and prosperously by working manfully through it, a world of substance and reality ; it tells that there are "everlasting habitations," that there is "a city whose builder and maker is God," that there is an inheritance reserved for us, "incorruptible and undefiled ;" it tells us that the touch of the Healer is the beginning of eternal life. And all this also we find to be true, in proportion as we believe and

honestly endeavour. Never is our true life greater, never is it more consciously precious to us, than when we hold to it, and pursue its highest aims, amid the wintry gloom of some present disappointment, and with the withered leaves of present failure rustling on our path. Shine down, heavenly Light, through darkened skies, upon our way! Drop, balm of heavenly healing, upon crushed and weary hearts! All-merciful Healer, break no bruised reed, quench no smoking flax! Or rather, help us to believe that Thou never wilt!

A deeper pain than any other attends the steps of death through all this dying world. The sorrow of death, however, is given to men in very varying degrees. To some there is not much of it, or at least it does not come very close to them. They

go away themselves, not having seen their best-beloved ones precede them in the inevitable way ; and in some families, although there is as much of death, there is less of the sorrow of it, because it does not come prematurely, or because it is not heralded by long and painful disease : one after another ripens slowly and falls gently ; they are mourned as they have been loved, but if they have been Christians the mourning for them is touched with thankfulness, and has in it even something of a solemn joy.

Ah ! but when the reaper whose name is Death comes sweeping with his scythe across the field of green corn, taking a swath here and there as he will, not sparing the greenest, the tallest, the strongest stalks—when he bends his dark steps towards the flowers, and takes the bud as well as

the blossom—when the father sinks before he has reached the hill-top of life, and the toil and moil of this world for him all end in this—that the legacy he has to leave to wife and children is one long dying look of unutterable sorrow and love—while yet, comforted and in hope, he leaves them to the Fatherhood of God—when the mother can gather the little ones no more in her arms, all the motherly watching ended, and for her rewarded in the death-sleep—or when the young themselves are taken in their brightness, and with the wonderful power which they have to shed brightness upon others—then there is a sorrow for which there can be no healing but that of Christ. Who but He dare enter into the darkened room where the mourners are weeping over their dead, and say such words as

these—"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted"? In the ministry of consolation it may be said that there are sharers with Him, and He means that there should be. Time, and occupation, and friendship are all healers; but these must wait till the time is fitting. Only Jesus Christ, in a room just consecrated by death, amid the broken hearts that are there, can calmly say, "I am come to heal;" only *He* in that pale presence can speak words proclaiming resurrection and life,—words offering *Himself* as the eternal security that life is to be victor over death: "Because I live ye shall live also." He writes these words on every coffin-lid under which sleeps the dust of a departed saint, and on every grave where that dust is laid. It may be in the crowded city graveyard, or away among the

lonely hills, or in the wastes of a savage land, or deep in some of the unfathomable caves of ocean: *He* knows the places where all His weary ones are at rest, and *He* comforts hearts broken with sorrow with the sure promise that out of that dust *He* will raise the fair immortal form, *He* will clothe the corruptible with incorruption, and the mortal with immortality; and “then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”



“He delighteth in mercy.”¹

SOME one may say, “This is only an assertion written in a book, and we want to see its fulfilment and its confirmations elsewhere. Where are these to be found?” They are to be found everywhere. It is true that you see the ravages of judgment here and there, and you hear the strokes of penalty resounding far through the world, as a nation that has been weighed in the balances and found wanting is cast down; but God’s tender mercies are literally everywhere; they are “over all His

¹ Micah vii. 18.

works”—spread over them as a covering, or as a mantle gently descending on them from above.

You see this fact even in the physical universe, although there only in its lower forms. There is a healing, helping, compensating, recuperative power working through the whole material creation, so far as we know it. If the rigours of the North are too keen, cutting into the roots of life, the cry for help will be heard in the Tropics, and their heats will be despatched on swift wings for relief; if in the Tropics the air is exhausted—if it pants, and burns, and seems to die—floods of fresh restoring air will be carried on the wings of the wind and thrown into the place of need; if a plant is bruised, the healing sap will make haste to help; if the finger is crushed or cut, the

fresh blood will rush to the wound, to double the common energies of life. When the earth goes through, as she does every year, the great meteoric river of the sky, she does it safely ; by delicate yet unfailing laws, by the tender mercy of God, the missiles pass by harmlessly, while the world-ship moves on.

And in ordinary human affairs the Divine mercy is always working. Each man meets it in his own life. Even those who lie under the greatest disadvantages have some opportunities left, or some chances to rise. There is no one morally so far gone that restoration is impossible ; and great multitudes are continually passing from sickness to health, from poverty to competence, from straits to freedom, from evil companionship and corrupting associations into better and purer

influences, from idleness into industry, from crime into virtue ; to say nothing of the greatest change of all, that from death into life. I know that the contrary process is going on as well ; men are sinking as well as rising ; they are, alas ! falling into the toils as well as escaping out of them. But they fall into them chiefly of their own will, or by the power of other wills ; God's mercy, if they would regard it, would keep them out of such disasters, and it is always busy in a hundred beneficent ways to work their deliverance. Any one might see that this is a world of mercy, even if he did not look to the Cross. Whatever be its source or cause, the fact is that Mercy walks the earth with tireless feet—healing the wounded, lifting up the fallen, shielding the weak, and restoring the wanderer.

And further, there is the more general beneficence of God—the feeding of all the creatures, and especially the rich provision which comes to man; good and perfect gifts, the sun shining on the evil and on the good, and the rain coming on the unjust as well as on the just. Men are not only not led to repentance by the goodness of God, but many of them presume and rebel, and grow hard in wickedness. They are cruel, proud, unjust; they are frivolous, worldly, vain; they lie, they cheat, they steal; they curse each other and God. What clouds of impiety and ingratitude rise from some parts of this world—from its great cities! And yet the rains of goodness come down; and the light of goodness shines; and the grass springs; and the corn ripens; and the ships sail the seas in safety; and the

houses stand firmly ; and the morning air blows freshly on the sinner's brow. For the long-suffering love of God is not yet wearied out, and Jesus yet stands and cries, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.”

But there is a proof and a presentation to us of the mercy of God infinitely higher than any other. There is an “unspeakable gift” of God—a gift of love such as no one could have imagined possible to be made to men. There has been a coming down of the tabernacle of God—of His very personality—to be with man on the earth. He who was higher than the Highest sank voluntarily down to the lowest abasement ; He who was rich became poor that we through His poverty might be rich ; the King became servant of all, and the holy, happy One sufferer for all. Ah ! we know

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the tale well. There is not a Scripture that tells it that we do not know. We have heard it again and again; and "use lessens marvel;" custom dulls the edge of wonder; the Incarnation settles down into a common thing. Yet how can this be? Why do we let it be? Why do we not feed our wonder each day and each hour at the great fact? Why do we not bring up our imagination to the gates of eternity out of which He came, and cry, "Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth? Will He bow the heavens? Will He come down?"

"O Love! how deep! how broad! how high!
How passing thought and fantasy!
That God, the Son of God, should take
Our mortal form, for mortals' sake!"

And why
I ask we not the question
afresh, "If He come, will He stay?
Can I stand well in this tangled, thorny

world? Will He live a year—through one rounding of the sun—among sinful men?”

“Nor willed He only to appear,
His pleasure was to tarry here;
And God and man with men to be
The space of thirty years and three.”

Ah, Divine Pilgrim! Loving Son of God! How solitary art Thou still through these long years of Thy earthly life! How few of us bear Thee company; fast in thy hunger; suffer in thy scorn; climb the hill and sail the lake with Thee! And why, above all, gather we not more frequently and more reverently about the Cross, making our way to it through Gethsemane, and Pilate’s Hall, and the Sorrowful way? How can we go up a mountain or a little hill without thinking of Olivet? How can we see the clouds without think-

ing of His chariot ? All this amazing revelation came from the spontaneous and everlasting love of God. Christ did not come to make God loving, but because "God is Love" therefore Christ came. It is not that the atonement replenishes the wasting fountain, but that the unwasting and unwearying fountain makes the atonement.

It used to be thought that the Nile might be traced up through one kingdom and another, growing narrower and still narrower in the ascent ; and it was imagined that if a traveller could be found who could endure the toil and the heat and encounter all the perils of the way, he would at last trace the stream up to its very womb and birthplace on some mountain side, whence it would run, a tiny rill like a silver thread, widening as it flowed. It has been done : a traveller

has gone up to the fountain, and what did he find there? Not the bubbling stream—not the silver thread. Listen to his own words:—

“The day broke beautifully clear, and having crossed a deep valley between the hills, we toiled up the opposite slope. The glory of the prize burst upon me suddenly. There, like a sea of quicksilver, lay far beneath the grand expanse of water—a boundless sea-horizon, on the south and south-west, glittering in the morning sun. And on the west, fifty or sixty miles distant, blue mountains rose from the bosom of the lake to a height of seven thousand feet above its level.”

So, trace all gifts, all goodness—natural, providential, or Christian—up to their ultimate source, and what at length will you find? A little spring? A scanty rill? A God hard, close,

limited, grudging? Nay; you will find what Jacob wrestled for the live-long night. His name will at length shine out before you, "God is Love," vast and fair as a spreading ocean, bounded by no mountains on the other side.

" Ocean of Life and Love unknown,
Without a bottom or a shore."



“**The Author and Finisher of our
faith.**”¹

A LONG line of the illustrious dead has been set before us in the passage preceding these words, and that line is, as it were, closed and consummated by one supreme example. The manner in which Jesus Christ is introduced is very beautiful. He comes in the line of all the saints, because He too is human; He is mortal, and is exposed to all that man can feel and suffer: He can hunger, He can thirst, He can have pain, He can be put to shame, He can die. But yet He is

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

above all and different from all. A break is made at the close of the description, and Jesus, while *in* the line of the faithful, is yet set out clear and high above them, and every one must see in a moment that He stands in a separate distinctive position. So, too, He is not described as within the "cloud of witnesses," but rather as waiting in a glory of His own, at the end of the course; His own race done, and seated for ever in joy and honour at the right hand of the throne of God.

He is the Beginner, the "Author" or Captain (it is the same word as that rendered "Captain of their salvation"), of all who have lived in faith; no one ever manifested so child-like a disposition, a confidence so steadfast, an obedience so loving, a submission so complete as His. And He not only

begins and leads, but He shows in Himself the perfect example of a religious life on earth; He is “the first and the last—the alpha and omega”—the one all-perfect manifestation of faith and holiness until the end of time.

If this rendering be correct, these words “Author and Finisher” are not intended to have a direct reference to our own faith as individual believers; and yet the great majority of Christian readers do think of their own faith as the thing that is here expressed, and of Jesus Christ as the Author and Finisher of *that*. Our translators seem to have thought so by using the pronoun “our;” and John Owen thought so, whose commentary on the Hebrews is probably the best that has yet been written; and many besides have been of the

same opinion. There is this also to be said, that while this former explanation is preferred by most commentators, and no doubt falls in harmoniously with the structure and strain of the passage, yet, in another view, it hardly seems so suitable to the Apostle's object as the old and well-known application of the words. That object is to encourage troubled and fainting believers. But we can well imagine such to say, "This eternal revelation of perfection and stability is beautiful. I see it, and admire; I see it, and despair, for I have nothing in common with it of my own; I try, but I cannot live such a life,—my faith wavers, sinks, seems sometimes to die. I need an outward picture indeed of truth and holiness, that I may see what I am to aim at and strive to reach; but I need also, and even

more, an inward power, that shall put forth creative energy at first, and that shall come again and yet again with revival and strength, that I may hold on my way, and triumph in the end—in short, I need an ‘Author and Finisher’ of *my own* faith.”

At any rate, this signification is profoundly true and scriptural, and may legitimately be made the basis of some further thoughts about Jesus Christ, as the “Author” of faith in every case where faith is true; the “Finisher” in every case in which faith is triumphant.

“*Author* of our faith.” That takes us back to the beginning. It may not be far back for some. Faith with some may be beginning only now, and with none can its birth be in the distant past. It often begins in deep impenetrable secrecy—not within the

sphere of the personal observation, hardly within the very consciousness. And like everything living, in beginning, it is delicate, tender, frail, easily hurt, and humanly speaking, easily destroyed ; it is "smoking flax," soon quenched ; it is a reed, soft and pen-sile, that can be stirred by the gentlest breath of a sinking breeze. Where is there any rational hope that such a faith can grow, and be strong, and do battle with the quarrelsome winds, and resist the biting frosts, and come to its fruit-season in due time ? In this —that you are not the author of your own faith. *He* is its author who knows the end from the beginning, and in His action never separates the two—who never values a beginning save as it leads to an end—who wraps up the end *in* the beginning, and makes all growth an evolution of what

in germ and principle has been there from the first. And He has all means and agents of growth at His command: dew to soften, winds to fan, light and fire to quicken, and a hundred subtle elements lying in the soil of providence, and in the heart, which will take their place in the development of the spirit, when they are called for, and when they are needed. Because God is its Author, your faith will live and grow.

See ! Yonder stands a man in the darkness on the side of a mountain, or on the deck of a ship at sea, with his eye towards the eastern horizon, "watching for the morning." There comes at last a touch of something on the darkness, a flicker or flush that cannot be called light, but is only as if it were struggling to be so—and then all is dark ; and the darkness is, or seems to be, deeper than before.

Suppose some one in the valley, or in the hold of the ship, should cry to him, "Watchman, what of the night?" He would answer, if he had never before been present at the solemn service of sunrise and daybreak upon the earth—"It is night still, it is deepening night, and no morning cometh." And yet that faint flushing was the morning; and the Sun, who is physically and instrumentally the author and finisher of the day, will be up soon, with his broad bosom all aglow with light, and before an hour has sped he will have driven the darkness from a thousand valleys and over the steeps of a thousand hills.

You are travelling along the road, the east wind is blowing, and the road is dry and dusty. There is a tiny pool in the middle of the way and from it a little stream is making

for itself a mud channel and flowing away defiled and impure to the side of the road. Come again in the morning—be the first to come—and you will see how clear the water is, even there, in the hard dusty road ; for it is a spring of living water ; it has never seen the sun before ; it comes out of the deep bosom of the earth—cooled in her darkness, filtered in passing through her unstained sands—as fresh and pure in itself as the snows of Lebanon, or the water at the gate of Bethlehem. It has washed the little pebbles clean ; it runs clear now ; and you are almost sorry when the road-maker comes up behind you, and casts down his broken metal to extinguish the troublesome impertinence. That he can never do : there, or somewhere else, it will make for itself a way, and however man may obstruct

or oppose it, it is the living water, and it will spring ever up in a kind of physical eternity.

Let us try to judge things, in ourselves and others, as they are and not as they seem. Faith *is* faith and Christ is its Author, whatever accidents, hindrances, or human imperfections may surround its birth. And it has a power of living on, of rising up, of resisting attack, of making a channel for its own life, of growing purer as it flows; a power given to it by its Author—the very power of His own life, by which He overcame the world, and rose up from earth to heaven. A wonderful consolation and a wonderful encouragement lies in the simple truth that Christ is the “Author” of our faith.

And observe that He is also its “Finisher.” As soon as the life of

faith is begun, His whole discipline is with a view to its perfection and completion. There is a sense in which our faith, *i.e.* our religious life, never can be "finished." It will remain a perennial growth, with and in ourselves for ever. We shall always believe in God and trust the providence of heaven as we do that of earth, only with a fuller trust, and obey His commands, and live to His glory. But this earthly time is in many ways a time by itself. Death is a grand crisis in human history, the life process on earth is then complete and the spiritual growth is revealed. No more can be done except in a new and totally different scene of things; and therefore the Saviour comes in the hour of death to every one of His followers and says, when the breath sinks and the spirit flies, what He said

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in the moment of His own expiring life : "It is finished."

We ought to be careful not to allow our thoughts to run in a narrow groove as to God's method of finishing such a life, as if there were in His ways anything like uniformity of plan. The methods are as various as human characters or human circumstances. There is one grand moral result to be wrought out, but there are endless "diversities of operations" employed to secure it. If Christ were again personally and visibly present on the earth, and if He were to send out the mandate to all His people, "Come at once to me; I desire to see you all in my presence, and to speak with you face to face," of course they would come; but would a single diary be enough to describe their journeys? Some would have a short way to

travel, some would come from afar ; some over mountains, some across the seas ; many out of cities, and many from deserts and solitary places ; some in companies, some alone. The diversities in the journeys and experiences in such a case would be literally endless ; and so are the diversities in the spiritual experience of Christian people in going along their ten thousand different roads to the one grand meeting-place in holiness and heaven.

There are many emblems used in Scripture to describe the work of progressive sanctification, and we have to remember that the “Finisher” is working His one great work by means of all the various methods they indicate. There is the emblem of growth in its several stages, perhaps the most typical of any ; there is the burning fire, in which the gold is dissolved

and purified ; there is the journey of the wayfaring man to his home, not without dangers by the way ; there is the conflict, which needs every piece of known armour, and all the soldier's strength and all his vigilance ; and now the one emblem and now the other is best suited to the same human life. The one thing we have to remember is that the "Finisher" is at work in them all ; it is He who watches the growing, who bears the traveller company and who arms the warrior for the fight ; it is He who heats the furnace and waits by it until the refined silver comes forth and the gold seven times purified. And it is this ultimate result in a perfected state, this completed work, for which the whole previous processes exist and are carried through. You have met with men fond of travel ; but the

man has yet to be born who would wish to begin an everlasting journey over the earth without an object, an end, or a home. "From strength to strength" is a grand note of Christian life; but how stale would even that become if there were not the higher note following: "Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." And so all heart-growing and all soul-beauty are parts of a process; they are beginnings towards an end; they are preparations for the coming of "the Finisher."

Nor does it matter (and this also we are to teach ourselves to think, and school ourselves to believe) at what time or in what way that final coming may be. It is for our Lord Himself to decide the time and the way and all the attendant circumstances. He comes in some instances,

as we think, prematurely, and finishes, amid the early blossoms of youth, the work which we had fondly thought would be carried on for long years to come. In other cases he delays His coming, even when the grain has to our eyes long been ripe, and works patiently at His great work after all has been done that seems possible on earth. In one case He "finishes" quietly, just as a painter gives the last light touches to his picture, and any novice looking on would not know what he was doing, or that he was doing anything. In another case He "finishes" with all the forces and severities of His kingdom in play ; sickness, pain, sorrow, remembered sin, fear, and agony ; through these the river of life passes, as through a roaring maelstrom, and the noise and the spray hide from our view the calm-

ness into which the waters immediately pass.

All these circumstances we must leave with Him to arrange and to conduct according to His own good and wise and holy will. Our part is to look to Him even more than to the process which He is perfecting ; the process will go on well if we look to Him, and the finishing will come at the right time. The "spirit-look" is always the indicator of the life : look to the world—you need do no more to lead the worldly life ; look to the prizes of ambition—you are going towards them as you look ; look to heaven—you are a citizen of the celestial city, and (looking still) one day not long hence the echo of your footsteps will be heard in her streets ; look to Jesus, who is revealed as the Author and Finisher of

faith—and your faith will grow as you look, the wavering conviction will settle into certainty, the dim hope will brighten, and you will know your path, although sometimes you tread it wearily, to be that of the just, “which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”



FRAGMENTS OF LETTERS, ETC.

Death of a Child.

SHE was but a little flower—a snow-drop of the early year—standing in lowliness beside the trees of God. What is there to say about a little child's life and death? We can never say all that a father and mother know and feel. But this we may say—that “of such is the kingdom of heaven”—that the Saviour makes them welcome yonder, as He made them welcome here—that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob must make room for *them* at the great feast of heaven, where

they constitute the majority of the company—that the growing which is interrupted here will be continued yonder—that they are gone to a rising which knows no setting—gone to be for ever under the cheering light and the cherishing warmth of the Fatherhood of God. The little frail ship, arrived at port in safety, seems to bring to us one more assurance that we too shall get through. The glory left on the way which such tiny feet have trodden, makes it a little easier for us to follow, a little more certain that we shall. . . .

. . . How shall we know our children in the future life? How shall the mother recognise her boy, who departed from her a wasted infant, after all the growing and blossoming of heaven? And how shall the father, who wept in secret

bitter tears over his daughter's decrepitude, distinguish her in her form of new celestial grace? What mean you, friends? Surely you do not wish to meet your children in the sorrowful plight in which you bade them farewell! The Lord will provide. But methinks it will perhaps be a busy day for these good angels who ministered to us on earth, when they find us out for one another and bring us face to face.

Words of Counsel.¹

... Will you let me say that I incline strongly to think that you ought to make your sister aware of her danger. I think you are wrong in supposing that the intelligence would certainly, or even probably, have any distressing or injurious effects.

¹ From *Records of Life*, page 150.

On the contrary, I think it may help her possibly through some internal conflicts into a more peaceful condition of mind. I am much mistaken if some shadows of the truth have not often crossed her mind already. But in any case, I cannot help thinking that she ought to know her own condition. The truth, even when it is so sad, will work safely—will probably be a very means of grace. You know I would be the last to attempt to force on any particular state of mind, and you know how much I trust in God's illimitable mercy and how hopefully I look to the future life; but I still come back to this—that we ought not to hide from ourselves and those dearest to us the knowledge of His way, although it may be dark and bitter to us for a little while. . . . If this be her call from the great Father to come home-

wards, she ought to be thinking of it sometimes as such. . . . It seems to me she ought to be trusted with all you know yourselves. . . . Perhaps that knowledge might (I have known it so) operate as a strong medicine, helping the healing and ultimate quiet of the mind. . . . If after the first shock of fear there should come quietness and confidence in God her Saviour, how good it would be! . . .

To one in prospect of dying.¹

. . . You are not nearly so much alone as appears even now. A great multitude is going with you. And how quietly they go! There is no difficulty. The great passing away from this world which never ceases is all as quiet as the movements of the stars. Death is terrible only to our

¹ From *Records of Life*, page 158.

fears. “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but *thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” That victory I do hope and believe you have begun to win. You are winning it in your weakness, and making it more and more certain by every day and night of weariness and struggle through which you pass. Rather *He* is winning it for you—He who has loved you and given Himself for you. . . . It seems the most unlikely of all the things I can imagine that He should cast you off, or leave you to perish. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Your sin, which you sometimes feel to be so great, and which I would not for the world teach you to think of as little—He will take it all away. In your most troubled anxious time

doubt not this. To doubt this would be to add one sin more to the long list, and that a sin which, while it continues, grieves Him more, in some respects, than all the rest. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins." He will perfect His own strength in your weakness; He will not leave you; He will take care that you get through. You are, in fact, partly through already. Having given up life at His will, although you love it dearly, you may be said, in a sense, to have died. . . . "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." After all failures, begin each day anew, and although after your best endeavours your obedience will seem so little, at best a poor stained worthless thing, and your sin so great—love Him and trust Him

only the more, and in a little while all will be well—you will be away beyond sin and sorrow, waiting for us on the hills of light and glory.

“Till the short night wears past
Weeping and prayer must last,
But joy approaches with the dawning day ;
There end the longings of the weary breast ;
The good sought after here is there possessed.
Ride o'er the stormy sea,
Poor bark ! soon shalt thou be
In the calm haven of eternal rest.” . . .

“Treasure in Heaven.”¹

This earth has many great qualities and many noble uses. It is a battle-field, where men may be soldiers and fight and win ; it is a great farm-ground, where workers may plough and sow and reap and gather and send home to barn and garnerage ; it is

Matt. xix. 21.

a shadow of some better world to come—a ladder up which saints climb in their very dreams to God and angels. This earth is full of beauty and promise, of suggestions, admonitions, helps. It has in it the food and nourishment of immortal hopes ; but it has no place—on mountain, valley, sea, or shore—where these hopes can be safely stored. Whatever the earth may be, it is not a casket where treasure of immortal creatures can be kept unharmed.

Lay it up in heaven. Ah ! that is the difficulty. Where is heaven ? How can we get our treasure there ? Who will carry it thither ? Who will protect it through the far spaces ? Who will receive it and put it in store ? Our thoughts, our loves, our hopes, our desires—these poor tremulous human things, how can they ever

rise and live and be deposited safely yonder?

Here let us accept our Saviour's further teaching, and we shall get great help by it, at least to begin with. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." Heaven is not only high but low, and He tells us that it is here; He came to bring it down—to plant a very kingdom of heaven here upon the earth, and to open its vast storehouses to faithful souls; from which they may take their strengths; in which they may lodge their treasures under the very watch of God. When you believe in the kingdom of heaven—when you do your duty in the commonest things—you are working in that kingdom; when after prayer and striving you have moments of triumph, you are sitting together with

Christ in the heavenly places. You do not need to strain your thought, to wing your way through the awful spaces of immensity, to look for the path that no fowl knoweth, and for the towers of the far-off city on which the angels stand ; you have but to go on with the works and along the ways of the Christian life, in diligence and lowliness, in faith and prayer, and you are laying up treasure on high ; you have but to be true to Christ in personal trust and love, and loyal in His service among men, and lo ! Time is Eternity, and Earth is Heaven !

“I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”¹

Paul had just been vindicating his independence and his manhood, and he follows it up with this: “I have learned to be content.” And these two things agree so fully, that in fact independence or self-reliance in its highest form will not be maintained without contentment; it will be only an inflated and a vain sentiment which a man has no power of practically holding, if he is a stranger to this gentler, yet in some ways even stronger grace.

Contentment is not mere apathy or sluggishness; it is not the cold indifference of a heart that desires nothing or cares for nothing. Although in

¹ Phil. iv. 11.

itself a quiet and passive thing, it is the result of much thought and exercise and long training. “*I have learned,*” says the Apostle, “these many years I have been at school—while travelling up and down; now in the light, now in the shade; in prison, out of prison; full, hungry; abounding, suffering need—the lesson has been taught me continually, and hard enough many a time it has been to learn it, and very imperfectly the learning seemed for a while to go on. But now I think I may say I *am* beyond fretting and striving, and murmuring and repining about outward things. I try to make the best of them, and to arrange them for the best; but I know full well that another hand is making the perfect arrangement, and with that, whatever it may be, I am content. If I only get along

the pathway of immortal progress towards the mark of the prize of the high calling, what matter the little changes in the weather that may come by the way? Sun or shower, hill or valley, day or night, I am content."

Oh, thrice happy he who can utter these simple words : "*I am content*"! Surely this is the philosopher's stone ; it turns everything to gold. It makes resting-place and Sabbath-quiet anywhere—in the heart of the city, if you will. Amid hurry and motion, and strife and noise, there may be this inner quietness, this measured portion in the human spirit, of God's own peace.

"*Threescore and Ten Years.*"

A fruitful decline of life here, a quiet, contented happy old age, is a

great blessing even on this side the grave; and it is a thing of great beauty. If those who are passing the usual bound of life are able to be satisfied, to be thankful, to be in sympathy with the young and with what is progressive in human life, although they have no longer a strong hand in the ordering things; if they can be calm and tolerably patient, and steadily hopeful, especially as regards the great future which lies behind the veil—theirs will be the mild mellow autumn beauty of human life.

And when they read, “We all do fade as a leaf,” the words, while still solemn and admonitory, will not be very sad. The inner thought of their heart will be not so much, “I *cannot* live much longer now; my time is growing shorter and shorter here; and some day soon I shall be riven

from the stem of my earthly holding, and carried away by the bleak wind of death like an autumn leaf." Rather the thought and feeling will be: "I *would* not live always here. This world is good, but it does not satisfy. Life was once fresh in my spring-time, but that freshness did not continue; and if it had, I could not have continued to be satisfied with it; I should have been always stretching on to summer prime and bloom. Life was fair, or it was overcast in that summer-time when it came to me. It was good, or it was *not* so good as I expected it would be, and as I tried to make it; but it is over, and I do not wish it might have stayed. I know that I am fading as a leaf among the rest, and I do not desire it to be otherwise. Let it be so. Let the furrows deepen in the cheek, and the hair be whiter

yet; and those that look out of the windows be darker still, as the night shades fall softly. I am fading with the woods and with the landscape, and by God’s grace I will try to look as beautiful and as peaceful as they. I will ‘endure as seeing Him who is invisible,’ and I will look through those deepening shades of earthly life and through the death-veil—which grows ever thinner as I look—to see, if I can, some outline of the better country, where I shall live and flourish for evermore.”

Established, Strengthened, Settled.¹

The word “settled” is sometimes used in describing a building which comes to rest securely on its foundations. In common phraseology we

¹ 1 Pet. v. 10.

speak of the “settling” of a house when the structure consolidates and comes to abide surely and immovably in its place. It takes years in some instances for that process to complete itself; and, as it goes on, flaws are discovered, and rents are sometimes made, showing clearly where the strength of the house lies—not in the mere walls, but in that firm foundation on which they rest, and on which the several parts settle themselves broadly and wholly.

We cannot but remember in this connection the one ultimate foundation of a sinner’s trust—other than which no man can lay—Jesus Christ, and the truth as it is in Him; and that the whole great process of Christian life and education is with a view to solidify the trust, and fix the faith immovably on Him. God’s first work in a man

is largely potential. He builds the framework of the new life. He gives enough, *when used*, to supply all the need. Yet, when the need arises, it is many a time very great. Through hunger, and thirst, and weariness, and storm, and battle, the soul makes way — often apparently with extremest difficulty — “troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down” — bearing about in the body the death-pains of the Son of God.

But lo! by means of all this searching and conflict and endeavour, there comes by degrees the growing fulness of the better life. Temptation brings increase of strength; assaults of the enemy, repulsed, give new courage; change carries away many a treasure, but, to fill the void, brings ever more and more of the “unsearchable riches.” Castles in the air, built on vain self-

confidence, melt from the sight, and the heart, convinced of its folly, comes to rest, with a child's simplicity of trust, and yet with a man's certainty of conviction, on Him who is able to keep that which is committed to Him, and is "established, strengthened, settled," at last.

It is literally *at last* with many a one. The final settlement is often just before the dying. It sometimes takes God a lifetime to teach us to flee from false refuges—to teach us to be humble, and to trust entirely in His Son, and in His own love, as brought near in Him. From many a pale, bloodless face there looks out at length the calmness, almost celestial, of a perfect trust. On many a dying bed you see the features which have been seamed and scarred and almost worn away by earthly care, and by

spiritual sorrow and fear, which seemed never-ending, smoothed at last into a serenity and a beauty caught directly from heaven. And from many a low voice, sinking into the last murmurs, you might, if you were near, catch the whisper of the departing one—“I am at peace now; ‘settled’ at last!”

We may all have “settlement” in Christ; it is intended and promised that we should have it, if we will, before the end of life comes. God grant, that if we have not this good thing earlier, we may all have it then!

THE END.

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